TWO BLACK CROWS *in the* A.E.F.

by

CHARLES E. MACK

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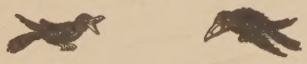
By

CHARLES E. MACK
(of Moran and Mack)



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To

My Good Friends,

The Makers, Distributors and Users

of the Columbia Phonograph Records,

Whose Interest and Encouragement

Have Meant so Much to

The Two Black Crows

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CHAPTER I

A Henpecked Crow

Wilhelm II, King of Prussia, Emperor of Germany, Supreme War Lord of the embattled Central Powers, strode up and down a gloomy hall of the Potsdam Palace. An awed group of warriors and statesmen stood in the background, drawn together by a common impulse. Nervously they waited for him to speak. From time to time the dull light picked out a blazing decoration or the polished point of a hussar boot.

At last the Emperor stopped and transfixed them with his cold blue-gray eyes.

"The thing is done," he said slowly. "We are now at war with the United States of America."

A voice rose thinly from the group of officials.

"Sire," it said, "the step was inevitable. It greatly improves our position. Now we can avoid

pretense. Ships bringing food and ammunition to the enemy may be destroyed without our former restraint. As our agents tell us repeatedly, the American Army is a shadow. The idea that it could accomplish anything against our veterans is fantastic. The Yankee nation has grown fat and indolent on war profits. Before the country could possibly train and equip a military force it will be too late. We shall have imposed the will of your highness upon the enemy."

A murmur of assent ran through the group. The Lord of the German Armies did not answer at once. He twisted a point of his famous mustache until it stood up at an even more defiant and quizzical angle.

"Perhaps you are right," he mused, "but I wonder. Our agents may have been unable to make a true estimate of the Americans. They are a curious people. A very curious people."

In a small and infirm shack on the outskirts of Buford, Tennessee, were two obscure citizens of the country under discussion at Potsdam. If the Kaiser had never heard of them, that made it fifty-fifty; for they had never heard of him.

The room was neither large nor gloomy. Sum-

mer sunshine poured in through an uncurtained window, flooding with light a growing pile of spotless clothes. The smell of hot irons against starched linen mixed with the raw odor of yellow laundry soap permeated the air. In one corner Camilla Crow bent over a scorched ironing-board, which she thumped with emphasis. Now and then she interrupted her work to fill her under lip with a new brush of snuff or to swap a cooled iron for a hotter one at the stove. She was a tall, black, skinny creature with a back as flat as her own ironing-board.

Pausing to sizzle the face of a fresh iron with a moist forefinger, she glared across the sketchily furnished room at her mate.

"Amos," she said in a rasping voice, "if you don't get a move on, dem potatoes won't be peeled in time for next Sunday dinner."

"I don't care if dey never get peeled," muttered her husband.

"Is I asking you whether you care or not? I told you to get dem potatoes peeled. I told you de fust time. I'm tellin' you de second time, and you know better'n to let me run into de third. I say peel 'em heah, and peel 'em now."

Amos sighed, but only an expert might have de-

tected the slightest possible increase in the speed of the knife he was plying.

Amos Crow was taller and blacker even than his wife. But there the comparison stopped. Instead of a spare and austere figure, he possessed a physique that was adequate and generous, especially at the waist-line. And while his waspish wife was furiously busy during her waking hours, Amos loathed all forms of work with a fervor amounting to fanaticism.

Especially did he hate the menial task in which he was now forcibly engaged. Knowing his aversion, the terrible Camilla made his hours at home hideous with potatoes. When she was around he peeled 'em or he didn't eat. Abusing her power, she forced him to extend his hateful operations. She pretended to her neighbors that Amos was passionately fond of unclothing these vegetables. Dusky housewives blocks distant brought their potatoes to the Crow kitchen where the embattled Amos was forced to remove their cuticles.

He was content with doing the paring for his own immediate family, but when Camilla took in potatoes, the same as washing, Amos realized that his frequent visits to Catfish Castle would soon be at an end. Amos might even have overlooked being

confined to the knife all day, but these personal deliveries thrown in, all for the profit of two potatoes from each family, was, as Amos put it, "the straw that would break an elephant's back."

Amos hated potatoes. He hated the expression of their eyes, he hated the feel of the skin with the earth still rough upon it, he hated the white, naked look of a potato after he had operated on it, he hated the raw, watery smell that came from it. And he never ate potatoes when there was anything else around with which to appease his stomach's yearning for a change of diet.

"I—I wish," Amos often said, "dat when dey planted potatoes, dey'd plant 'em wid onions. Den, when de onions got in der eyes dey couldn't see to grow."

About the house, his only friend was Bingo. Bingo was a dog. He was a long brown dog with white spots. Amos claimed him to be a bird-dog but admitted that he liked the birds cooked. Apparently his family tree included every known breed and several that were as yet undiscovered. For all that, he was a wise dog and he loved the browbeaten Amos with every atom of his body. At present Bingo was dozing in the sun so that his adoring eyes could rest on his master

when a fly bothered him and made him waken. He could never get it through his head why Amos preferred to stay indoors and handle those vile potatoes on a bright and lazy day like this. But he suspected that the tall and fearful woman thumping the ironing-board had considerable to do with it.

A snaky peeling coiled from under Amos' knife. He cast it aside and dropped the denuded vegetable into the pan. To get his mind off his misery he made conversation.

"Well, Camilla," he tried to put a convincing emphasis into his voice, "I may be leavin' you before long. I may be goin' away from heah."

"When?" demanded Camilla, turning on him with a look of unflattering anticipation.

"Well, not right away, maybe,"—Camilla resumed her ironing with evident disappointment,—"but look like it'll come. It's account of de war. You heard 'bout de big war, ain't you? Well, dey ain't doin' so good wid the fightin', *our* side ain't. So dey gone and got serious up at Washington. It sho' look like dey gonna call me out to help put an end to all de ruction. Yassah, Camilla, if dat Kaiser ain't careful, he gonna get men into dis thing—an' if Willie an' me go over dere, we gonna beat up on dose people."

He expected to get a rise out of her and he was not disappointed. "Boy," she said, "somebody's sho' been lyin' to you. 'Cause I got different war infohmation and I got it direct."

"Well," said Amos, "my infohmation is 'thentic, 'cause I got it indirect."

"You heard me speak about Henry Skip, maybe?"

"Plenty times."

"Well, dat boy's in de army. And what's more he's a sergeant. A sergeant—and I could have married him once, too! What you know 'bout dat? Huh?"

"Yeah, but you didn't want to marry him when I displayed myself. You sho' didn't. Way you flung yourself at me was plumb immodest."

"Well, Lawd knows I've suffered for my mistake. You is my cross, Amos, and I bear wid you like a good Baptist ought to. But sometimes I almost break down when I think that I could have had Henry Skip 'stead of you. I tell you Henry is a sergeant in de regular army. U. S. Infumtry is what dat boy is, and he ain't stopped yet! It'll be a mighty bad day for dem Germans when dey run up against Henry. Dat boy ain't afraid of nothing. Lions, snakes, Germans, nothing."

"Yeah? Maybe he is brave like you say. But seem like he's got dis war all messed up. 'Cause dey is callin' on us to come help him out."

"Ain't you brave!" Camilla gave her busy iron an extra heavy thump to express her contempt.

"Sho' I'm brave. Why, dog-gone, gal, you heard about dat bad gambler from Cairo, didn't you? You heard about what I done to him?"

"I heard all right."

"Cose you heard. It was all over dis part of Tennessee. What I done to dat boy was nobody's business. He was bad, too. De toughest boy on de Cairo levee. I run dat boy good. I run him past de outshirts of town."

"Outshirts?"

"Sho'. Where de town stops an' starts to go ahead again. I run dat boy so fast down de railroad track dat when he turned a curve his vest pocket dipped sand."

"Yeah?" sniffed Camilla. "I heard all about how you run him. Way I heard it, you might have been the engine in dat race, but you wahn't no caboose."

"Gal, why don' you stop actin' like some new kind of fool?"

Amos dropped another loathsome potato into the pan and reverted to his original subject.

"Jest the same ole Uncle Sam's callin' on Amos to jump in an' help him out with de war. He sho' is. You heard about de Draft Ack, maybe? Well, I see de sheriff to-day an' he invites me to come into de Court-House an' git registered for de army. Dat's how bad dey needin' men like me. 'Fore long I may be over in France peelin' Germans wid my razor. Gal, I ain't foolin'."

Camilla had finished her ironing. She tucked an apron over the heaped basket and prepared to depart. At the door she paused and turned.

"Maybe you is goin' get in de war," she said, "but you can't make me believe it. I never had no such luck."

After the latch clicked and Amos was sure he heard her steps on the wooden sidewalk, he threw aside the potato knife and listened intently and with evident expectation. He was not disappointed. In a few minutes a low musical whistle sounded from the back of the house. He answered with a similar note. Presently the rear door opened and a swarthy head was thrust doubtfully in.

"She gone?" asked the head.

"Sho' she's gone," Amos assured it. "She gone to Major Robinson's wid de week's washing. House is safe an' comforble. Come on in, Willie."

On this guarantee the hesitant head entered the room followed by the rest of Willie's person. Bingo deserted his spot of sunshine and trotted over to the newcomer to indorse his master's welcome with wags of an eloquent tail.

CHAPTER II

The Crows at Catfish Castle

Willie and Amos were inseparable. As a description of their complexions and a tribute to their fidelity they were known in Buford as the Two Black Crows. They were not kin to each other and they had been ushered into the world under names in nowise resembling "Crow." The name was wished upon them by farmers whose cornfields had suffered at their hands. Both were so fond of this delicacy that during the season they sometimes collected roasting-ears without bothering to inform the owner. The people of Buford had rechristened them after the marauding bird they resembled, and they had come to accept it. After all what did it matter if Crow was the legal surname of neither—a name is worth nothing unless people call you by it.

Of the two, the small and agile Willie appeared on first acquaintance to be the more brilliant. But experience usually proved that Amos, for all his lumbering proportions and tired accents, was less

than half as dumb as he looked. Persons of keen insight had remarked more than once:

"I reckon that Amos ain't such a fool. He never does any work. To escape labor in these war times you got to be something of a genius."

Willie's clothes expressed a different status from that of his friend. He wore a vociferous checked suit that had once been the property of an out-of-town visitor who labored under a delusion that he knew stud poker, a stiff collar and a tie that would have meant war to a bull, while a battered brown derby and poisonous yellow shoes with horns on the toes completed his costume. Willie was a foot-loose bachelor and considered himself irresistible to the dusky maidens—from those of a high yellow to the ones of a teasing brown; while those of an ebony hue were far beneath his condescending notice.

Willie had to pay for his liberties with labor or strategies. Strategies usually prevailed, assisted by a pair of loaded dice skilfully manipulated by his nimble fingers. Were it not for the fact that fortune favored him with being the sole heir to these spurious cubes, handed down from generation to generation by his humble ancestors, Willie might have been forced to perform undignified and

menial tasks, similar to those allotted to Amos. However, up to the present time, his principal occupation seemed to be his successful efforts at getting these loaded dice in and out of the game without detection.

The town was dry by local option. As a further accomplishment in helping him escape the necessity for labor, Willie could dig up a gallon of "mule" if one gave him three dollars and an hour's notice—or without notice for five dollars.

To mask his less respectable activities he was sometimes to be seen in the Planters' National Bank. On these occasions he was accompanied by a pail of soapy water and a mop. By applying one with the other he sought with some show of diligence to remove from the bank's mosaic floors the scars left by town depositors and the mud tracked in by customers from out in the hills.

Willie noted the pan of peeled potatoes and knew its significance. In a voice meant to be maddening he asked: "Been peelin' potatoes, Amos?"

"No," the other retorted with sarcasm, "just shuckin' a few watermelons."

Willie grinned. "You sho' is de potato peelin'-est man in Tennessee. I never see how you could get rid of all de peelin's."

"We don't get rid of 'em. We jes' throw 'em in de yard an' kick 'em around till dey're wore out."

In a more sympathetic voice Willie asked, with a fearful look over his shoulder, whether Camilla had been bearing down on him.

"Bearin' down!" repeated Amos. "I got saddle sores all over my back. Dog-gone, boy, she's got me plumb cowed, dat gal has. Plumb cowed."

"Well," countered Willie, "ain't dat fair enough?"

"How you mean fair enough?"

"You bull her all de time; nothing but right for her to cow you."

In his subdued condition Amos let this witticism pass. His mind had gone back to the events down at the Court-House.

"Willie, you think Uncle Sam gonna make us go to war? You think dey gonna do dat?"

"Well, I put down my name for de draft," admitted Willie, "but it don't bother me none. Dey cain't make me fight lessen I want to."

"Maybe dey cain't make you fight. But dey can take you where de fighting is and you can use your own judgment!"

Willie observed with some feeling that it was

all right for Amos to regard the war prospect lightly. What if he did go and get killed; Camilla's shrew-like abuse and Amos' dread of the detestable kitchen duty at home convinced Willie that a stray bullet might only favor Amos with its fatal aim and deadly certainty. But he (Willie) was young and in his prime and free to "projeck" around with all the gals without submitting to the rule of any one of them; he had no hankering to get weighted down with German ammunition.

"What made de Germans hop on us, Amos?" he concluded.

"Well, I guess dey was just lonesome for trouble. Huh? But, boy, dem Germans going get dey bellyful of fightin' from now on. Maybe dey can wrassle wid dem Chinese and English and Scandinavins and Eskimos, but dey ain't seen no fightin' yet. Jest wait till us Angry Saxons get into battle. Dem Germans gonna think it's snowin' wildcats."

"Way you talk," Willie observed, "anybody'd think you was rarin' to get at 'em. You must be eager to be an angel."

"Naw, I ain't as military as dat. You gotta die sometime. But dem Germans—— Boy, dey kill you dead and dare your spirit to move! Why, dey got cannons shoot a hunderd miles and den throw

rocks at you, an' I hear dey got a new gun now, dat all it needs is your address, an' I'm ready to give 'em Camilla's."

"Well, it don't lissen good to me."

"Don't do no good to worry, Willie. Jest turns your hair gray before your time. 'Sides we're a long way from Germany now. Over a thousand miles, boy. 'Tween us and dem is de ocean. And you know how wide de ocean is? Old ocean is five times as wide as Reelfoot Lake, dat's how wide the ocean is."

Willie gave a long low whistle. The idea of so great a space separating him from Armageddon was extremely comforting.

It was, in fact, so comforting that Willie's mind snapped back to the cause of his visit. He inquired casually if Amos had any money. Amos said instantly that he hadn't a cent.

"That's too bad," said his friend, " 'cause me and Shug Wells and Horse Fly Jenkins and Joe Dick and a few other boys goin' meet in de back room of de Catfish Castle for a dice game. Sorry you cain't get in 'cause this is to be strictly cash."

"Aw, boy, why didn't you say dat in de fust place? Cose I got money for times like dat." He delved into a secret pocket and emerged with a

silver dollar, three quarters, two nickels and a dime. "Always got money saved up for emergencies, Willie. Always. Lead me to de victims."

Amos left the unpeeled potatoes and the dire threat of Camilla's return without a tremor. Like the rest of his race, he never wasted time worrying over the future. He reasoned that when trouble was coming his way, it was folly not to seize the pleasant opportunities offered by the present. Camilla had gone to cook hot supper for Major Robinson's family which meant that she would not be back until late. If Amos dined before that he would have to prepare himself a snack. That meant mostly sowbelly and potatoes.

Potatoes! Ugh! How he abhorred them! Down at the fish house one could buy channel cat fried in a thick coating of meal, flanked by great chunks of yellow corn bread, all blessed and washed down by scalding coffee.

Despite his pleading whines, Bingo was told that he could not go along. On going out behind Willie, Amos slammed the door with such emphasis that the old shell of a house creaked protestingly.

"Come on, lift your steamboats, Willie, lift 'em."

"Look heah, Amos, don't you dare call my feet steamboats."

"Dey look like steamboats to me."

"Yeah, and if you ain't careful, you're goin' to take a long ride on one of dese boats," threatened Willie.

"Well, if you ain't goin' to walk, get out of de way and lemme in de lead."

Thus urged Willie stepped out briskly. Amos managed to keep close in the rear in spite of the fact that his broken-down arches and his natural lassitude worked against rapid locomotion. As they pushed open the sagging front gate, Bingo heard the noise and took it as final proof that he was being forsaken upon the anticipated return of the dreadful Camilla. He let out a dismal howl of protest from within the house.

The route to the Catfish Castle led past the Red Cross Drug Store on Buford's main street. What the forum was to Rome, the corner of the Red Cross Drug Store was to Buford. Here gathered the citizens of the town to announce and discuss the exciting news events of the day.

Since the entry of the United States into the war and the passage of the Draft Act, the afternoon sessions were devoted exclusively to the happenings in distant Europe. A crowd of unusual size was gathered this particular afternoon and the Two

Black Crows paused to hear the latest. They had a personal interest in this war now, and if anything of importance was on foot they felt that they had a right to know it.

Loud voices came from the center of the crowd. Two men were in an argument, and one of them was holding his temper with some difficulty. A tall tanned gentleman with a wrinkled and leathery neck whispered to his neighbor.

"War ain't de only thing dem two boys disagree on."

"I'll say it ain't." And both the men laughed.

Because of his greater height Amos was able to look over the heads of the others and discover the cause of the excitement. He saw a young man, whose great shock of curly, copper-colored hair was bare, and whose gray eyes were blazing. Facing him stood an older man wearing the peaked campaign hat of the army at a rakish angle, and the shoulder that was visible displayed the yellow brown of a khaki uniform with a single silver bar. He affected a tiny black mustache which was shaved to the center of the upper lip after the manner of the British. He was saying:

"——and just because you don't believe it, that doesn't prove anything."

"It proves," the younger man shot back, still trying hard to curb his anger, "that I'm not fool enough to believe all I hear or everything I see in print. And I do not believe that the Huns, as you call them, are guilty of all the brutal things people have charged them with."

"Why not? Here it is right in the paper."

"That still doesn't make it true. The Germans are human beings even if we are at war with them. And you'll never make me believe they boil down their dead to get lubricating oil, or that they cut the hands off children, or that they shoot innocent women in cold blood."

The man in uniform laughed.

"Well," said he with contemptuous reproach, "your name's Rhinehart, isn't it?"

"You know that's my name."

"That's German. I reckon you've got some of the old Hun blood running through your own veins. That's why you stick up for 'em so strong."

Rhinehart's resentful answer was drowned in the excited comments of the listeners who hopefully scented the near approach of a physical encounter between the two men.

Willie had been pulling Amos' sleeve all this time. His efforts to see between the shoulders of

the crowd were of no avail. Amos, towering above him, had been so interested in what he was hearing that he had paid his companion but slight attention.

"What's de trouble, is dere goin' to be a fight?" Willie asked hopefully.

" 'Tain't nothing. Nothing a-tall," Amos answered. "Jes' another one of dem bum war arguments."

Great as was the excitement to them of a prospective fist fight, the alluring possibilities of a dice game commanded their interest more, and without further delay, they turned and resumed their way toward the Catfish Castle. Whereupon, Amos enlightened his friend further:

"Lootenant Davis was tryin' to get Steve Rhinehart's goat, an' he didn't miss it. It's a shame de way dey pick on dat boy. Just because he happens to have a German name and because he come from somewhere up North. Since I met him I found out de Yankees can be just 'bout as good as anybody. I'm tellin' you dat boy is sho'-'nuff white folks, and all right."

"Maybe he is," Willie retorted, "and maybe he ain't. But he ain't got no chance with Miss Mary Jane now."

"How come dat?" Amos demanded with considerable heat.

" 'Cause, in de fust place, Major Robinson is pullin' for Mister Davis. And in de second place de war came along and let Mister Davis strut around in his lootenant's uniform. You know how gals is 'bout uniforms."

"I know dat," Amos recalled his own formidable Camilla and her hero sergeant, "I know all dat. But 'tain't right jest de same. Dat Davis man's too old for dat little Mary Jane. An' he's too sporty. Ain't he always runnin' down to Memphis for two or three days? And ain't he totin' a bokay of flowers and candy when he leaves? Besides Camilla is cookin' for de Major and she knows Miss Mary Jane likes Mister Rhinehart best."

Willie, who was fond of Rhinehart, but for argument's sake and not to agree too readily with Amos, uttered his seeming contempt for these statements. "Only reason you talk dat way is because you like dat boy yourself."

"Cose I like him. Cose I do. Who is it lets me hang out at de deepo when Camilla and potato peelin' makes my home a hell? And who is it give me dis yere two bits for helpin' him put de baggage trunks on No. 4, de time when dat no-'count Friday

Lawson got so deep in his liquor he couldn't work?"

But right there the argument came to a sudden halt. They were nearing the portals of the Catfish Castle and their eager nostrils were assailed by a seductive odor that was half frying catfish and half forbidden drinks with an alcohol base. Their palates watering, their faces shining with beautiful anticipation, they pushed open the cracked glass door and entered the smoky but enticing interior.

After what was to them a most gratifying meal—their appetites appeased with food that manifestly would have been unwholesome to those with more fastidious tastes—they repaired to a secluded room in the rear. It was a small storeroom, lighted by a single, lonesome, incandescent light. If you had been known to the fat proprietor and had knocked the proper number of times on a door of this sequestered room, you, also, might have been admitted to this local palace of gin and chance.

Eight hours later the Two Black Crows were still there. Seven darkies formed a circle on the floor. Now and then one lifted a fretful, perspiring face and wiped off the shine with a ragged and agitated shirt-sleeve. The seven knelt in a tense rigid circle. From the reverent attitude that each of them had assumed it might have been supposed that they

were solemnly engaged in their daily devotions to the Creator of all being. The actions of Willie at the moment would have given strength to the appearance. For he had straightened on his haunches and was addressing fervent supplication to a certain unholy deity—the Goddess of Chance.

A small pyramid of silver formed the center of the kneeling devotees. This wealth Willie regarded with no uncertain confidence as he raised his cupped fingers to an eager ear and shook the contents.

"Roll 'em, Willie, roll 'em!" commanded a petulant voice. "What you tryin' do—rattle de spots off?"

Willie disdained the interruption. The five dark fingers encompassing the bones brushed his thick lips. As he shook them one against the other he whispered words of direction and syllables of dark magic. Again he raised the hand to his ear and listened. He listened with the strained attention of a finished musician who tunes a loved instrument. At last, detecting the desired response, he dropped his hand and liberated the two cubes.

"Wham!" he cried.

The dice bounded across the floor. One spun and displayed a five. The other teetered for a

sickening second on one edge and came to a final rest with a two uppermost.

"Five and two make seven!" With this inexorable bit of arithmetic Willie made a single motion which scooped up the silver and the dutiful dice. A mournful exhalation escaped the six dark faces that looked up at him.

"And, now, boys," Willie observed patronizingly, "if there's anybody here dat ain't convinced, let him shell out and finish his education. Any more candidates for de pore house? Anybody been holding back small change?"

A mournful silence was his answer.

"Then I'll be bidding you adoo."

He rose from his stiffened knees and backed toward the door. Broke but faithful, Amos followed to cover the retreat. Outside Amos expressed a doubt that had been in his soul for a long time.

"W-willie," he said ominously, "lemme look at dem dice."

Willie shook his head. "Dice is dice de world over," he declared.

But the winner's heart was not all adamant. In accordance with his established and sympathetic precedent, he returned to the inept Amos a tenth of the money he had won from him.

CHAPTER III

Mary Jane and the Rivals

Officially, slavery ended with Abraham Lincoln's proclamation of emancipation. What that famous document failed to do was free the white folk of responsibility toward their former chattels. In Buford, as in most other towns of the South, each colored family considered that it had a fair claim upon some white family. These rights were pretty well respected. A legitimate switch was recognized when some less desirable household was given up freely by its colored proprietor.

Not because of any segregation but because of clannishness, the colored citizens of Buford gravitated to a section of the town known as Henpeck. Of all the denizens of this precinct, Camilla was the most envied. Her terrific ardor for work and her skill at cooking had enabled her to annex the kitchen and washing business of Major Crawford Robinson.

Major Robinson was not given the title out of courtesy. He had earned it fairly by fighting

Spaniards and typhoid germs in the awkward campaigns of the Spanish-American War. Beyond that, he was exalted above his fellow citizens by two facts—he was president of the Planters' National Bank and he was the father of Mary Jane Robinson the unchallenged beauty of the town.

The Major was a widower. He lived with his lovely daughter in a large old-fashioned manor house, set in an imposing grove of oaks out at the end of Church Street. It was noted that the young men always turned their eyes to the Major's house when they walked or drove past. Of late a despairing look had come to most of them, for it was generally admitted that the ardent campaign for Mary Jane's heart had narrowed down to a single pair of rivals.

As far as one could judge, these two contrasting personalities had about an equal chance for the town beauty. Steve Rhinehart was twenty-two, some three years older than the girl. He had come down "from somewhere up in Illinois" to help out Old Morgan, the railroad agent who was getting too old to take care of his job properly. With the enthusiasm of his years, stimulated by the charms of Mary Jane, Rhinehart threw himself into his new job as if he loved it.

He was a combined ticket agent, freight agent, telegraph operator, and the Lord only knows what else. At times when his porter succumbed to his periodical bouts with booze, Rhinehart had to handle the baggage. The boy could frequently be seen riding the switch engine or standing wide-legged on top of flying freight-cars, his gray eyes dancing and his hatless shock of copper-brown hair rippling in the wind. In these moments he was the envy of every adventurous kid in the town.

Amos was frank in his espousal of the cause of the outlander against his local rival. Once when he saw Davis swagger past, Amos observed to Willie:

"President better call out dat Davis man pretty soon."

"How come?" asked Willie.

" 'Cause he's gettin' so warlike he's liable to mobolize himself at any minute. Way he talk look like he's getting ready to take dis war into his own hands."

And it was a fact that First Lieutenant Ashley Davis, of the local company of the National Guard, did not underrate himself. You couldn't have called him a profiteer, yet he was one of those who, with the hope of personal advantage, welcomed the entry of the United States into the conflict.

Davis was fifteen years Mary Jane's senior. He came of an excellent family that had been in that part of Tennessee longer than any one could remember. Soldiering was the only thing that had ever really interested him. He had tried the coal business, the automobile business, the insurance business, the grain business. In most of the ventures he had lost money; in all of them he had lost interest. At last he had come to where a lot of men come in the South—he got to dabbling in cotton futures. He had inherited a small fortune and from the way he lived he was considered well-to-do. But in his capacity as telegraph operator, Rhinehart saw messages that passed between Memphis cotton brokers and Davis which indicated that the cotton transactions were not always to the profit of the trader.

Davis had long been in the militia. When war came his experience enabled him to obtain a first lieutenant's commission with ease. From the minute he donned his uniform he became the recognized head of Buford's war party. He was outspoken and profane in his criticism of President Wilson's "timidity." He did not hesitate to expose the strategic errors of the Allied generals; he chafed to get into the fray himself.

Those who thought Davis all swagger did him an injustice. He was in reality the type from which good soldiers are made: tall, strong, with plenty of courage—audacity even. He had no tolerance for those whose views disagreed with his. In his use of the epithet "slacker" he was boldly indiscreet.

Davis' popularity with the girls had been greatly enhanced by his uniform. He had always been too much of a ladies' man to marry. Never, until little Mary Jane Robinson blossomed into a devastating beauty, had he considered the restrictions of matrimony. The size of her prospective fortune did not lessen her attractiveness.

Of the two suitors, Major Robinson, being an old soldier and a burning patriot himself, was slightly inclined toward Davis. He was too shrewd to try to force his views upon his beloved daughter. But he had a way of adroitly dropping remarks, subtly calculated to impress her in behalf of his favorite one of the two.

"Davis tells me they may be called to camp any time," he would say, with quiet indifference, watching her from behind his paper to see the effect of this utterance. Or, "I see the papers say they're going to rush all the American soldiers over right away. The National Guard will go first."

To do him credit the Major had nothing against Rhinehart. He even liked him. But, after all, the boy was an outsider. No one knew anything about him, and his prospects weren't brilliant. It would be better, the Major thought, if Mary Jane could be inclined to an alliance with some one whose record and outlook were fully established.

Mary Jane, with shyness and apparent unconcern at such times, pretended she was too busy to bother her pretty golden head about prospective husbands. A great war was raging. She could not fight but she entered into the auxiliary work with all the ardor of her nature. Misshapen socks by the hundred she knitted. She saved food until her father jokingly protested that she was starving him to a slow death. The Belgians and other down-trodden peoples were given bundles of old clothes—a tender subject in the family because one of the Major's suits which had been worn only twice had been included in a previous enthusiastic contribution.

It was a joy to see her rushing about town in her little roadster with Prince, her Airdale, beside her. Earnest adoption of all Red Cross activities had earned her the right to a gray uniform with military buttons, and a Sam Brown belt. The dull color

only enhanced the pink perfection of her skin, the depth of her brown eyes, the lyrical curves of her slim young figure.

And the Great War was creeping closer and closer to the little town of Buford.

Closer and closer also to Amos and Willie. The conflict was beginning to take on a personal and particular look. An official document arrived by mail, which Amos, being unable to read, had to take to Willie. He found his friend perusing a duplicate. It turned out to be a notice that their numbers had been drawn and that they would be expected to appear shortly at the Court-House to be examined as to their physical fitness for service. By some process they did not understand officials in Washington had drawn certain numbers. It was made painfully clear that these numbers corresponded to their numbers in the draft. They were going up before the doctors.

It looked bad. It looked awful bad.

They were pondering these things as they made their way down the M. & O. right-of-way one hot morning. The agile little Willie was as usual in the lead. Amos was dragging his protesting feet behind. They were petulant toward each other and toward the world. For the first time Amos noted

that railroads prefer, for ballast, rocks with sharp corners which make walking most painful.

"Come on, boy," fumed Willie. "What's holdin' you back?"

"My shoes," drawled Amos.

"Dem old suitcases!" Willie eyed the ancient coverings with contempt. "Ain't enough of dem shoes left to hold you back."

"Dog-gone, boy, you oughtn't to talk 'bout my shoes like dat. You know what dem is? Dem's pattin' an' leather shoes, dem is."

"Patent an' leather?"

"Sho'. Leather on top an' my bare feet pattin' on de ground."

"Well, you goin' to walk faster dan dat when dey get you in de army."

"Not me, Willie! If dey don't like de way I walk dey can get me a bicycle."

Their exchange was interrupted suddenly. Passing a string of box-cars they came upon young Rhinehart. The boy was sitting on the end of a cross-tie chewing moodily on a splinter and gazing at the ground. He was so submerged in his own thoughts that he did not look up until they spoke.

"Hello, Mister Rhinehart," Amos said. "You look like you lost your best gal."

The boy started and smiled up at them. "It's not that bad," he said, "I haven't lost her, but it looks as if I'm losing my other friends."

"What makes you think dat?"

"I don't think I'm very popular about this town. Damn the war anyhow!"

Willie and Amos indorsed this last sentiment.

"I don't see why people can't let me alone." Rhinehart was evidently glad to tell his troubles to sympathetic listeners. "They ride me about my German name. Hint I'm not a good American. Try to make me enlist."

"Aw-aw!" Amos murmured. "*His* feet look all right, don't dey, Willie? Uh? Who started dis thing, Mister Rhinehart?"

"Some one is turning them against me. I can feel a different attitude toward me, a coolness in the air, when I pass people. I say I don't believe all the things said against the Germans. And when the remark gets back to me, I discover that I'm a German sympathizer and even suspected of being a German spy." He laughed bitterly. "As if there was anything around here to spy on."

"Aw, boy, dat's bad!"

"It's worse than that, Amos. It is said that if I'm a good American I would be in the army.

I'd join in a minute but I can't go now. I've got a sister who is sick all the time. She'd have a mighty hard time if I didn't send her money. I'll go when they call me but, for her sake, I've got to stick on here as long as I can."

"Then why don't you tell 'em dat?" Amos asked.

"I've told 'em that over and over. But nobody knows much about me here. It looks as if I'm just making an excuse to keep out of the army. It's a tough break for me. Right when I—well, now that I've got to like the town and the people so."

Amos murmured his sympathy.

"Well," Rhinehart shook himself as if to get rid of his mood and rose, "it helps some to get it off my chest."

While they would not admit it, the Crows knew something about this change in sentiment against Rhinehart. They had heard that people were beginning to draw away from the boy. After all, nobody knew anything about him. And why was he always standing up so strong for the Germans?

CHAPTER IV

Lost: Two Bits

There was at least one person who did not fall in with the growing hostility to Rhinehart. Luckily for him, she was the most important of all. He could have had no more ardent defender than Mary Jane when any one hinted that his patriotism wasn't all it ought to be. If the other person were Davis she made her defense stronger than ever. Davis could never tell whether she really believed what she said or whether she was merely doing it to goad him.

"The war has made all of us sort of crazy," she had a way of observing, "nobody's normal now. Look at the way they tarred and feathered that old German barber up in Kentucky. They thought the perpetual-motion machine he was trying to invent was a bomb to blow up the town. And when it comes to things like that, I reckon we aren't so different from the Germans."

"But," Davis would protest indignantly, "don't you think the German troops are brutal?"

"Certainly. I think the German troops are brutal. Also the British troops are brutal, the French troops are brutal and the Americans will be brutal when they get into it. It's a brutal business. You're no good at it if you don't make yourself as brutal as the man trying to kill you. I agree with Steve, however, that most of these atrocities you hear about are just what he says—propaganda used by the Allies to work this country up to a war frenzy."

Often the scandalized Davis asked her to stop. As a faithful officer in the service of the United States he did not want to hear her continue. Nevertheless, in spite of her rebellious moments, the lieutenant felt sure the girl was flattered by the attentions of a man so much older than she and so much more sophisticated. His egotism even let him think that the figure he cut in his flawless serge uniform was not without merit in her eyes.

At any rate he continued his suit with the unflagging confidence of a good soldier. He was often to be seen by her side in the little roadster. She had four pictures of him in uniform. At regular intervals long packages of flowers and square packages of sweets went up the drive between the old oaks to be delivered into her hands.

One night Amos was dragging his reluctant feet toward home and the formidable Camilla, when Davis burst out of the Red Cross Drug Store with a package under his arm. The soldier tapped our dark hero smartly on the shoulder and inquired in a crisp military voice:

"Amos, like to make a quarter?"

"What doin'?" Amos countered cautiously. You could never tell. The earning of a quarter might entail the breaking of one's habitual leisure.

The answer was reassuring. "Oh, there's no work to it. All you have to do is take this box up to Miss Mary Jane's house."

It so happened at this particular time that Amos was badly in need of two bits. With that amount he could dine to repletion at the Catfish Castle and face the ordeal of his own fireside on a full stomach, devoid of potatoes. He accepted the offered commission eagerly. The box was handed over to him, and Davis, wheeling, started away, clicking his heels smartly.

"Hey, Boss!" Amos called in a panicky voice.

Davis ignored the hail.

"Captain, Boss!"

Still no answer from Davis.

"Major!"

Still no response.

"Colonel!"

Silence from the other.

"Oh, General!"

To stop these promotions, Davis was finally forced to pause and turn. "Well?" he said.

"How 'bout my two bits for carryin' dis package?"

"Oh," Davis laughed, "I haven't anything that small with me now. When you get back, stop in at the Elk's Club. I'll pay you then."

Amos grumbled inwardly, but he couldn't back out now. As a favor to his feet he took a short course to the Robinson house. It led over the railroad tracks. A lustrous summer moon lighted his path across vacant lots high in rank growths of fennel and ragweed. His route brought him to the back of the Robinson house. Here he was met by Prince, Mary Jane's Airdale who, true to the sympathy that exists between dogs and colored people, came forward quietly and with wagging tail. A friendly odor told the dog plainer than sight that this was Amos, a co-victim of Camilla the cook, a man who knew how to scratch a dog's ears properly.

Skirting the dark kitchen wing, Amos went

around the house. The lawn was splashed with shifting flakes of silver light. The grass was deep and velvety. Amos' shoes, almost free from soles, made no sound as he slid them along. Turning the corner of the front porch the messenger of Eros was surprised into rigidity by the sound of sobbing. Moreover, it was a woman; there could be no doubt of that. He coughed to make his presence known and noisily shuffled up to the wide stone steps. Here he waited until Mary Jane appeared from the darkness cast by the screen of ramblers. When she came into the light cast by the hall lamp there was no doubt as to who it was he had heard sobbing.

"Sump'n dat soldier boy sent you, Miss," mumbled Amos as he presented the package. It disturbed him greatly to see tears in her eyes and a sympathetic sigh escaped him.

"Thank you very much, Amos," she said pressing a ridiculously small handkerchief to her eyes.

"Miss Mary Jane," Amos blurted out, "anybody been hurtin' you? Is dey? 'Cause if dey is——"

He had to let it go at that. He wanted to tell her that his life and his razor were at her service, but somehow he didn't know how to word it properly.

The girl flashed her white teeth in a laugh.

"Amos, you're an old goose. You're a nice old goose, but you're hopeless just the same. Don't you know women cry when they're perfectly happy as well as when they're miserable?"

"Sho' 'nuff now?" Amos marveled. "Is dat a fack?"

At the moment he looked as dumb as ten oxen. Nevertheless he had a pretty clear idea of what had happened. As Mary Jane disappeared in the shadows with the box of candy, Amos heard the creak of a swing and he caught the flash of moonlight on a bare copper-brown head. And when he was far enough down the drive to be out of sight from the porch, he executed a shuffling dance to express his delight.

"Hot ziggety!" he exulted. "Look like my friend, Mister Rhinehart, stole a march on de army. Dat purty little gal done made her choosing and Colonel Davis he's de one what got left."

His pleasure in the evident defeat of the lieutenant was heightened when he went around to the Elks to collect his twenty-five cents. No, said the porter, Lieutenant Davis hadn't been there and wasn't expected there. No, he had not left any two bits to pay Amos or any one else for toting a package out to the Robinson house.

Out on the sidewalk Amos turned his bitter heart and aching feet from the direction of the Catfish Castle and headed for home. His soul was tortured by the picture of one hundred and fifteen pounds of raging Camilla and a peck of unpeeled potatoes. But he kept his toes on their course. For, after all, one must eat. One owes it to one's stomach.

CHAPTER V

Cold Feet and Flat Feet

And still the war inched up on them. There came a blazing hot morning when Buford, including Henpeck and its environs, realized its proximity to the trenches. It was the day when the men holding the first draft numbers were to appear at the Court-House for physical examination. There had been some grumbling and protest against the Draft Act, but when the morning arrived it was evident that there would be no trouble.

From all the roads leading to Buford, tall columns of dust rose into the aching sunlight. Word had gone out from Washington and here in Tennessee—as in California, Minnesota, Connecticut and all other states—men were obeying. They rode on blooded horses and on mules which jogged along with hanging heads, thankful for a vacation from the corn rows. They came in ancient buggies. Now and then a long touring car or a rattling Ford swept by, leaving the sweating riders to curse the dust they raised.

It was a relief to reach the paved streets of the town, even if the heat that rose in quivering waves from the soft asphalt was worse than it was out among the fields. The crowd in town made it look like First Monday. Every hitching rack about the Court-House and in the jockey yard was occupied by a stamping and switching animal. There were so many cars they created Buford's first traffic problem.

Henpeck had caught the excitement. Amos, contrary to his usual habit, had not slept well, but it wasn't the heat that disturbed him. He was one of the unfortunate heroes whose number was in the first to be taken, and the fact that Willie shared this honor did not comfort him when the deferred actuality became an immediate fact. Ordinarily the problems of life worried him no more than they worried Bingo. But here was no ordinary problem. It was the fear of the unknown that overcame him.

Strange people, strange places, having to do just what you were told, maybe crossing an ocean, foreign towns, men shooting at you with guns as big as houses—the prospect was not one to encourage sound sleep.

The lanky Camilla paused in her breakfast preparations to favor her under lip with a fresh

supply of snuff. She could not hide her delight in the subdued condition of her mate.

"What's de matter, Big Boy?" she asked with pretended concern. "You ain't eating a thing."

"Oh, I don't know. I don't feel well."

"Well, I know. You're skeered. You're skeered to death because you done got caught in dat draft."

"Maybe dat's it. But I really don't know. I really don't."

"Well, if you ain't scared you'd better be. I just got a letter from de sergeant——"

"I would rather not hear about his letters. I really would rather not."

"——and de letter say: 'It's getting dangerouser and dangerouser every minute over where de fighting is at.' By de time you get on de ocean Germans will be shooting at you from de bank."

Amos let the remark lie. His gift for ready repartee seemed to have deserted him this morning. Rising from his half-eaten breakfast, he reached for his hat and called to Bingo. The dog roused himself from a shady corner and followed down the street. He trailed his master along the hot plank walk with his tongue hanging so low it was in danger from splinters. By a perfect understanding

that existed between them, Bingo felt the heavy mood that was oppressing Amos.

On the way to the Court-House they stopped at a ramshackle colored boarding-house and picked up Willie. The smaller half of the Two Black Crows had dressed in honor of the occasion. Despite the heat his white collar was higher than usual, his tie more resplendent, his horned shoes of an extra-poisonous yellow.

"Dog-gone, boy," the gloomy Amos greeted him, "you dressed up like you think you goin' to a funeral."

"Well, way you draggin' dem feet along anybody'd think it was your funeral."

"Dat's what I feel like it is."

"Aw, boy, you're crazy. Dey is just a register-in'. Dat's all. Dey want to sort of view you and put your name in de book."

"Yeah? And maybe dey want to put my body in front of dem Germans to inhale dem bullets." He added that some people, without calling names, didn't have enough brains to go crazy with.

A buzzing sweating crowd swarmed in and out of the old brick Court-House. In the crush Amos caught sight of Lieutenant Ashley Davis. The town's leading warrior had nothing to do with the

day's proceedings, but, as one country boy observed under his breath, Davis probably came down to "give 'em a treat and show what a sho'-nuff soldier looked like." To do him credit, his tall straight figure and flawless uniform gave him the air of a competent and self-contained warrior. In spite of the hot serge cloth and the stiff collar buttoned tight under his heavy chin, Davis appeared to be the only cool man in the crowd.

The minute Amos caught sight of the officer he edged toward him. Plucking a khaki sleeve he said: "Please, sir, Mister Davis, you ain't never paid me dat two bits for carryin' de package."

"What's that?" Davis wheeled from the man to whom he had been talking and gave Amos a frown. "What is it you want?"

"Two bits, please, sir. Just two bits. Dass all."

"Amos, do you realize the seriousness of what you're doing?"

"My goodness! Am I wrong again?"

"Wrong! Don't you know you can't come up like this and talk to an officer? Remember you're in the draft now and that means you are practically under army regulations. I'm an officer, you know. Even if I owed you any money the military code wouldn't allow me to pay it under such conditions

as these." He turned his back and resumed his conversation.

Amos couldn't tell whether he was being kidded or not. But of one thing he was sure: he wasn't going to get his two bits. As he and Willie worked their way through the crowd toward the door he comforted himself with the knowledge he had stumbled on, the night he delivered the lieutenant's package. He was glad this man wasn't going to get the town's prettiest girl.

Inside the Court-House men were being formed into lines along the fly-specked plaster walls. Slowly Amos and Willie edged forward in the queue reserved for colored registrants.

"Amos," said Willie, "if it wasn't for de Jim Crow law, we wouldn't have to be in dis heah line, and I don't like it."

"Pshaw!" said Amos. "I like it, and I hope dey don't reverse dat law in de war."

Bingo kept pace with their advance until they came to the room where the clerks and records were. There the dog was forbidden to enter, and a white man ran him out the front door where he took up his station and waited for the return of his master.

They took Amos' registration card. They asked

him questions. They wrote something in a book and passed him along. In the room beyond were the examining doctors. They held shiny instruments that did not allay our hero's nervousness. But it was with some relief that he heard himself hailed by Doctor Blanton. The doctor was an old friend. Amos felt he could get help here if it was to be had anywhere.

The doctor smiled reassuringly. "Well, Amos," he said, "how do you feel?"

"Aw, Doctor, I don't feel well."

The doctor grinned wisely. He was strapping a round mirror to his forehead. "Sorry to hear that, Amos. Maybe I can help you."

"Aw, Doctor, I doubt it. Seems like I've suffered a complete breakdown."

"I think the main trouble is you don't want to get into the army."

"Aw, Doctor, how can you talk like dat? How can you, now? Why, ain't nothing I'd like better dan joinin' up to massacree a few Germans. Willie says he likes to fight when he feels like it, but he don't want to make no regular business of it. I ain't like dat. Nossir! Ain't nothing I'd like better dan fightin' as a regular job, but my health just won't permit it. It really won't, Doctor."

"I can see what's wrong with you, all right."

"I'm glad of dat, Doctor. I sho' am. 'Cause if you can see what's wrong wid me you know my liver is disorganized, my lungs is in a disgraceful condition and my kidneys is floatin' round inside me widout an anchor. I'm glad you can see all dat, Doctor."

But the physician shook his head. "You left out the one symptom I observe. You are suffering with a severe attack of Frigidair feet."

"Yassir, and dat ain't all, Doctor. I got ingrown heels, too," said Amos.

"There is nothing to be afraid of," the doctor continued. "You may never have to go oversea at all. Don't lose your nerve until you know what's ahead of you. Get off your clothes, now, like these other boys and let's have a look at you."

"Yassir," Amos assented meekly. And he began unbuttoning his frayed shirt.

What they did to him then was nobody's business. They made him strip down to his coal-black skin. Then they looked him over as he had seen shrewd horse traders look over questionable nags. They made him hop around the room on one foot. And despite the seriousness of the occasion, the sight of Willie and other boys he knew, jumping

around naked on one foot, brought Amos a welcome fit of laughter.

After the hopping, doctors with tubes in their ears listened at his chest and back. They explored his throat with small head-lights. They made him say, "Ah." They made him look at charts with letters that he couldn't have read if the type had been ten feet high.

To the surprise of all, Amos displayed a perfect torso and shoulders. He was a tower of masculine strength. He was flattered when the white folk commented on his arms. They asked him how he could have attained any such development when it was notorious that he avoided all pretense of work. Amos tried to help them figure it out.

"Guess de thing makes me so strong," he suggested, "is that I never done much hard work. Some boys get weak workin' too hard. I always protected myself from dat. I been savin' my strength for de government. And here it all is."

The doctors were complimenting Amos on how he would look in uniform, but a rude disappointment was in store for them. The examiners got to his feet.

It turned out that north of his feet Amos was an almost perfect physical organization. But

the condition of his walking equipment nullified all his other perfections.

A circle of doctors gathered about Amos and looked upon those two feet with fascination. They exclaimed. They marveled. They pointed out to one another fantastic defects that might have been overlooked in that noble gathering of pedal disabilities. Had any one ever seen such a perfect case of flat feet? Would you look, now, at the astonishing width of them? Where could you view heels that trailed off behind like these?

So much comment finally roused Amos' curiosity in his unique equipment.

"Doctor," he asked one of the examiners, "how you reckon my feet got so big like dat?"

The doctor winked at his companions. "Several causes might be responsible," was the answer. "For instance, you know how fertilizer makes crops grow?"

"Yassir."

"Well, your feet might have developed the same way. When you were little, you walked around barefooted in the cotton fields. You got the fertilizer on your feet and they simply became overdeveloped."

The candidate was attacked with a sudden fit of laughter.

"Dog-gone!" he exclaimed. "I guess my Aunt Jenny must have set down in some of dat fertilizer."

Amos' torso almost had him in the army. His feet had saved the day. The physicians ruled him out definitely but with regrets.

The youngest medico of the lot, who had just come back home after a course at Vanderbilt, insisted that Amos remain a while. He was fired with the zeal of youth. Phoning for a camera, he took a series of pictures of Amos' lower extremities and made copious notes upon their shortcomings. It seemed that he was especially interested in this part of the human body, and he was certain that he could immortalize these particular feet and gain some fame for himself by writing an illustrated article on the subject for the *Southern Medical Journal.*

CHAPTER VI

The Champion Liar at Work

When he finally regained the outer air, Amos bore a document certifying that he had been examined for the army and found wanting. He found Willie and a delighted Bingo waiting for him.

"How'd you come out?" Willie asked.

"Fine. I'd 'a' been out of luck though, if it hadn't been for my feet. Dem feet saved me and dey saved the Germans from having to battle me." He displayed his card, and asked how Willie had fared.

"I slipped through too. When dey measured me I squatted a little. So man said I wasn't tall enough. Hot dawg!"

They smiled broadly at each other and filled their lungs with deep breaths of the air. It was hot and full of dust, but it was free. Bingo sensed that all was well again. He added his grin to theirs and beat softly upon the parched grass with his tail.

The day was not to pass without further excitement. One incident became important only when

people looked back on it. There was another argument at the corner of the Red Cross Drug Store.

Young Rhinehart had been stopped by some of the louder patriots and had been forced to sustain again his view on the war. He tried his best to keep his temper, but the day was hot and his natural disposition agreed with his copper-colored hair. After he had broken through the crowd to keep from getting into a fight, there were murmurs that something ought to be done about him. Were they going to allow a slacker and German sympathizer to remain with his insults in their midst?

Late that afternoon Amos accompanied Willie into the Planters' National Bank. The floor had not been swabbed for two days now and it had been made clear to Willie that he would have to do a little cleaning or the institution would sever relations with him.

"I'll come along wid you," Amos had said.

"Will you help me?"

"No, I won't help you. I won't do dat. But I won't hinder you. Seems like ain't nothing gives me more pleasure dan watching other people work. Dat goes just double for you, Willie. Just double."

No one had ever accused Willie of being energetic, but he made a great show of efficiency with

the mop and a bucket of suds. Too great a show for the comfort of some visitors. His careless plashings contaminated the immaculate cordovan leggings and shoes of Lieutenant Davis who passed on his way to the rear of the bank. The apologetic Willie was favored with a glare.

The Planters' National closed down its business officially at three in the afternoon. Actually it stayed open all sorts of hours: there were farmers in to see about their notes; merchants with drafts; business men who dropped in for conversation more than anything else. The free-and-easy schedule had kept the place open longer than usual on this particular day. It was almost dark but people were still going in and out past the industrious Willie and his motionless friend.

It would have been too much for Amos to aid Willie with his bank duties, but at least he could lighten the time with conversation. Talk was one of the few activities Amos allowed himself and in spite of the lazy way he dragged out his words, his line usually intrigued his friend.

"I used to work in a bank once," his weary accents informed Willie.

"You work! Boy, did you ever work anywhere? You is the most spasmodic worker I ever did see."

"Yeah, I guess dat's the trouble wid me. I work spasmodic. And dem spasms of work don't hit me very often."

Willie was wringing dirty suds out of his mop. "I'll say dey don't."

"Yeah, but just the same I worked in a bank once. It was down in Memphis. On Beale Street, it was."

"Dog-gone, boy, I don't believe you ever was in Memphis."

"Maybe you don't believe it. But just the same dere I was. Working in de bank on Beale Street. I didn't exactly do any hard labor. Cose I didn't do dat. I had to stand round and wear a uniform and look important, dat's about all. De uniform was blue wid solid gold braid and buttons all over it. Wid a cap to match. All I done was stand out front and when any rich folks come I opened de door of de car for 'em and bowed 'em into the bank."

Willie moved his bucket to let a lady's skirts go by and regarded his friend with a skeptical eye.

"It's a fack, Willie, just like I'm telling you. And I was kind of a guard too. If any burglars come in I had to protect all de money. Dere was billions and billions of dollars in dat bank.

Boy, when de cotton crop come on de market dat bank had so much money dey had to handle it just like hay. De greenbacks dey pitched wid a pitchfork. And silver money was piled up wid a grain scoop. It was de only way dey could take in all de money. Boy, I ain't fooling, burglars was bad dat year, too."

Willie voted himself a rest. He knew Amos was one tall liar, but the picture presented roused his interest.

"Did any burglars ever break in?" he asked.

"One time, dat's about all. But maybe you don't want to hear no more 'bout it."

"Oh, sure," urged Willie, "sure I do. Did the burglars get anything?"

"Aw, boy, how could burglars get anything? Ain't I telling you I was there? 'Twas only one burglar de time I'm talkin' 'bout. Wasn't nobody in de bank but de man dat pays out de money and me. Dat's all. De burglar comed in wearin' a black mask over his eyes and carryin' two guns so big dey ought 'a' been on wheels. I scroutched down in de corner where he couldn't see me and de burglar goes over and hops de cashier.

"He was a little old, bald-headed man, de cashier was, but he had plenty of spunk. He grabbed de

burglar round the throat and throwed him down on de marble floor. And down on de floor dey went round and round. Wasn't anybody watching all de money but me. And like it say in de Bible, Willie, I was tempted."

"Aw, boy!" breathed Willie.

"It was sho' temptin' to see all dat money lyin' dere while de burglar and de cashier wrastled on de floor. Finally I was tempted beyond my strength. It look like de bank was going to be robbed anyhow, and what did dey care who robbed it? Wouldn't dey rather have a friend like me rob it, dan some total stranger like dis burglar?"

"Sho'," agreed the hypnotized Willie.

"Well, the burglar had de cashier down. So I grabs a empty coal scuttle, hops behind de counter and filled de scuttle full of silver and hunderd-dollar bills. Den I run out from behind de counter. But by dat time, old cashier was on top. So cose, I had to run and put de money back. When I come out again, de burglar was on top; I got my bucketful of money again. I kept runnin' in and out like dat 'cordin' to who was on top. But finally de burglar and de cashier rolled over behind a desk. And, boy, dat was my chance. I went out de door wid my scuttle like I had been shot from a

gun. Well, I got down de street a little ways and I heard a shot. Zing! A bullet went by my ear. I looked back, and dere was de burglar standing in de door of de bank shootin' at me."

"Did he hit you?" asked Willie breathlessly.

Amos paused for effect. "Aw, boy! He just ruined me," he answered solemnly.

His hearer snapped out of his trance.

"Dog-gone, boy, you is de champion lyin'est man in Tennessee. Dat what you is, de biggest liar in Tennessee. An' all I want to know is: Do you take dat stuff in a spoon or do you shoot it in your arm?"

And to emphasize his sarcasm, Willie plied his mop with lightning vigor.

CHAPTER VII

Something Falls on Amos

While Amos and Willie were thus killing time outside, Lieutenant Ashley Davis sat in the office of the bank's vice-president. The lieutenant and the banker were speaking in subdued tones because this office was cut off from the others by a low partition open at the top, and they did not care to be overheard. The vice-president was an old man with a long face, a look he had acquired from constantly taking a banker's view of the world.

"I knew your father," he was saying to Davis, "I've done all I could for you on his account."

Davis was not looking him in the eye. He had picked up a pencil and was making meaningless designs on a pad. "Well," he murmured at last, "being in the army——"

"We honor you for that. And I have given you all the consideration possible. We have renewed this note four times. Friendship has gone that far for you. Good banking won't let us go further."

"I'll scrape up the interest——"

"I'm sorry, but interest won't do. We've got to have a payment on the principal and a good-sized one."

"I'll see what I can do," Davis murmured and rose to go.

As he closed the door voices were coming over the partition from the office of Major Robinson. Davis overheard the first words because he couldn't help it, but he listened to what followed for a different reason. Leaning against a near-by counter he pretended to be figuring on the back of a check. It was soon evident that the bank president was in conference with the Two Black Crows.

The Major's voice came over the partition: "Willie, have you or Amos heard about a bad black man from Mississippi being in town?"

"Nossir, Major," the reply came in unison.

The fact was that they had been in a disastrous crap game with the bad man the night before, but, true to the code of their race, they told nothing to white folk.

"The man's a yegg," the Major's voice continued, "a bad actor from all we hear!"

" 'Fraid of burglars, Major?" Amos inquired.

"Not for the bank. Our vaults are strong enough for any of them. But I'm a little uneasy about

some money that has come to the express-office. They close at night and I would feel safer if that currency shipment were in our vault. That old express-office safe could be robbed with a can-opener."

"Yassir," they said and waited.

"I want to go and get the money. Phoned the marshal but he can't be located. I'd feel safer if you boys came along as a body-guard. Will you do it?"

They assented with enthusiasm.

"Good." Davis heard a drawer open. "One of you take the gun; the other the bag."

"Yassir."

Davis knew the three were getting ready to leave. He went out of the bank ahead of them. At a rapid stride he made for a little group of buildings down beside the railroad. There was the station, and, beyond, the little box that housed the express-office. Nearer town was the Hot Dog Lunch Wagon. It controlled a view of the other buildings.

Davis sauntered casually into the lunch wagon and ordered a cup of coffee from the sleepy servitor who was chef and waiter. As he put his army felt hat on a nail his eye caught sight of a gray-checked cap hanging next to it. There were no other customers in the place. Davis recognized the cap and knew how it got there.

He had seen this cap on the head of Steve Rhinehart. Most of the time the boy went bareheaded. Evidently he had come here for a sandwich and had gone out without the cap.

"He's damn' proud of that curly hair of his," Davis enviously said to himself. "Wants to let it get the air."

Added to his other reasons for disliking the boy, there was the vague resentment of a man, whose hair is thinning at the approach of middle age, against a youngster with a more luxurious growth.

As Davis sipped his coffee he could not keep his eyes off the cap. It fitted into a desperate plan which had suddenly sprung into his mind at the bank. He had fought it off. But temptation returned now with increased and irresistible force. A voice was whispering insistently within him:

"It's your chance! Your escape! Plenty of money—and the little girl. Luck put the cap here for you. Use it. No one will ever know."

Major Robinson followed by Amos and Willie had gone by and entered the little express-office.

Davis got up and tossed a coin to the waiter. He straightened his shoulders and turned to where his hat hung. The waiter did not notice it, but when Davis left, the gray-checked cap left with him.

Inside the express-office, little old Casey, the agent, was handing over the bank's money with considerable relief. He too had heard rumors of the bad man from Mississippi.

"There you are, Major," said he. "Ten thousand in currency and a thousand in half-dollars. Will you sign for it here, please?"

The banker signed and began stowing the money in the old brown grip. Amos and Willie watched with popping eyes. The silver came in a heavy canvas bag while the bills were in three packages, wrapped with strong manila paper and heavily incrusted with brown-red seals.

Here was eleven thousand dollars in cash! The Two Crows had never seen so much money before. They were awed by the familiar, even careless, way in which Major Robinson handled it.

Because it was the heaviest, the bag of silver went into the grip first. The parcels of currency were stowed around it. After making sure it was all there, the banker closed the locks and straightened up.

"All right, boys," said he, "let's be going."

"All right, Amos," Willie echoed, "you grab the bag. I'll have to keep my hands free for the gun."

Amos felt honored at being allowed to tote this wealth and he did not understand why until he hefted the bag. Its weight surprised him and explained why Willie had relinquished the burden. The currency did not weigh anything, but when you carry a thousand dollars in silver you know you're carrying something.

It was dusk by the time they got out, and but slightly cooler. Street lamps had been turned on, each bulb a gathering place for myriads of dancing insects.

"I had no idea it was so late," observed Major Robinson as he glanced at his watch. "Mary Jane will be wondering what has become of me."

The returning column was headed by the imposing bulk of Major Robinson; Willie followed with the revolver ready, and Amos brought up the rear, with his treasure and his aching feet.

"Dog-gone," the burden-bearer said, shifting the bag from one hand to the other, "if I had a million dollars I wouldn't want to tote it around in nickels."

"Your feet didn't get flat from carryin' money," observed Willie.

"Naw, and your growth didn't get stunted from weight in your pockets neither."

Walking ahead the Major chuckled.

"Boy, you been poverty-stricken so long you wouldn't know what to do wid money if you had it," said Willie.

"Well, pore as I am, I ain't no poorer dan you are."

"Aw, button up your mouth! Ain't I got a trunk full of clothes, home?" said Willie.

"Lissen heah, 'Blacker dan me,' you ain't even got a home. And furthermore, you are now standin' in de middle of your trunk. Any time you button your coat, your trunk's locked," taunted Amos.

"Well, if I ever got money, 'twouldn't take me long to get used to it."

Amos shifted his bag again. "Oh, it wouldn't, huh? What would you do if you had all de money I'm toting right now? What would you do, huh?"

"Aw, boy!" Willie drew a deep breath and allowed the ecstasy of the suggestion to percolate through his soul. Then he proceeded to describe at great length how he would expend his wealth, the ensuing picture being his idea of a made-to-order heaven.

First thing, said Willie, he'd get the longest and reddest automobile in the world. Then he would buy a green suit with a silk lining and a silk shirt with red stripes down it. To set off his necktie he

would invest in a diamond pin that would make him stoop-shouldered just to carry it. And course he'd have a cane and a derby and gold rings all over his fingers. Then he'd build a house that would have a special room covered with a silk carpet for crap shooting. The dice would be gold with ruby eyes set in for the spots. And then——

"Come on," the Major interrupted. "You two do more walking and less talking."

"Yassir, yassir," said Willie. "Come on, here, Amos. I never see such a slow poke as you. We're holdin' back the Major."

They were in a deep shadow cast by a building. When he turned to look back, Willie could not see his friend.

"Lawd Gawd, Major!" exclaimed the frightened Willie, "Amos is gone!"

"Who's gone?" asked the Major.

"Amos. Dat's who's gone."

Upon turning, a sudden unwelcome suspicion entered the banker's mind.

Both started back on a run. They had not taken many steps in the shadow before Willie stumbled over something large and soft.

"My Gawd, Major!" Willie cried. "It's Amos! Look like he's killed."

"Where's the bag?"

"Don't see it nowhere. Yes, here 'tis. Here 'tis. Reckon he's daid, Major?"

But the Major had taken the bag out of the shadow into the light of a street lamp. Examination showed too plainly what had happened. The bag was still locked but a crooked hole gaped across its length. The heavy sack of silver was inside, but the package of bills had been taken out through the knife-cut.

"It's gone!" cried the Major. "The ten thousand dollars is gone!"

Willie had found his voice and discovered that he was holding a revolver. Into the hot evening air he sent a series of hysterical yelps. "Murder! Fire! Robbery! Help! Police!" And each word was punctuated with a shot from the revolver which he had pointed straight up and was pulling, his eyes shut tight.

"Shut up that damn' noise," cried the white man, "that won't help any."

"Aw, Major, it helps my feelings," blubbered Willie as he gazed down at his fallen friend.

His cries brought results. In three minutes it looked as if everybody in the down-town section had gathered around them—except Town Marshal

Tittsworth. As usual, you could count on him being anywhere except where he was needed. There were questions and excited exclamations. Had Amos tried to rob the Major? Did the Germans have anything to do with it? How much money had been stolen? Was Amos badly hurt?

"Give him air," some one shouted. At which every one crowded up closer than before.

By this time they had decided that it was only fair to the victim to see whether he was dead or alive. Willie had gone to a near-by store and came back on the run with a bucket of water which sloshed with his motions. The splashing helped make a path for him to the horizontal and unconscious Amos. What was left of the water he threw in Amos' face.

At this violent baptism, Amos stirred, groaned and, with Willie's help, sat up. He felt the top of his head where a visible bump was rising.

"What happened?" asked a dozen voices.

Amos groaned again. "I was jest—walkin' along," he spoke dazedly, "jest walkin' along—listenin' to Willie gabbin'—and de buildin' or something fell over on me."

"No, no! Some one hit you on the head. The money's gone."

"Gone!" Amos repeated, sitting up very straight and looking wildly about. "You say dey got de money! Major, did dey get de money?"

"I'll say they got it!" was the grim assent.

Amos gained his feet with difficulty. The news that he had been unequal to his trust, that ten thousand dollars he was toting, was almost overpowering. Secretly, he observed to himself, that was what happened when you let yourself in for work. It would be a lesson to him; he would never tote anything else for anybody as long as he lived. The money was gone, he had a throbbing headache and a bump that felt like an ostrich egg. He began to protest that he would find the thief if he had to track him down to the end of the world.

No one was listening to him. By common assent the crowd was moving toward the bank. It's numbers grew as it went along. With the speed of bad news, tidings of the robbery swept through the town. At the bank the crowd pushed inside. The doors had to be shut to keep out the crowd.

Lieutenant Davis was there, asking questions and inquiring solicitously whether he or his men could help catch the thief. In a few minutes there was the sound of a motor outside and Mary Jane ran in to join the crowd. She was in her gray Red

Cross uniform. Her brown eyes were wider than usual as she hurried to Davis and asked for the details. They managed to get Amos and Willie to one side, and Amos had to repeat his story for her.

"Oh, Amos," she said, "I'm so sorry. Did it hurt you much?"

"Hurt mighty bad," admitted Amos, "after I come to. I didn't feel a thing when it hit me. Seem kinder like de lights all bust in my face. After de lights went out I didn't know a thing."

"Have you any idea who did it?"

"No'm. Ain't got de least idea."

"Not a clue?" demanded Davis.

"No, what!"

"I say was there no clue—nothing you found to give a hint as to who did it."

"Nossir, Cap'n. Didn't find none of them neither."

"Then what's that you're hidin' in your pocket?" The lieutenant's words were as sharp and hard as bullets.

Despite Amos' protests, Davis reached forward and pulled something out of the hiding-place mentioned. It proved to be a checkered gray cap.

Amos apparently was as amazed as the others at the discovery.

"Well I be dog-gone!" he said slowly, looking at the cap with a pretense of incredulity, "A cap! Dog-gone, how you speck dat got in my pocket?"

"I speck it got there because you put it there," retorted Davis.

The four examined the cap carefully. Fortunately, they were in a corner to themselves for the moment. The crowd had been drawn to the other side of the room where it listened with sagging jaws and much comment while Major Robinson explained the robbery to the sheriff. Davis turned the cap over and looked inside.

"Where'd you get it, Amos?" he asked. "You know it would be a serious thing for you if you held back the truth. If you try to shield the guilty party that makes you guilty too. You'd have to stay in jail a long time to work out ten thousand dollars."

"Cap'n," Amos answered, "I found dat cap in my hand when I woke up from dat lick on my haid. Dat's Gawd's truf."

"Know whose it is?"

"Nossir."

"Well, I do. Look here."

He indicated a place on the stained leather band inside.

"S. R.!" exclaimed Mary Jane, and her heart gave a frightened leap.

"Rhinehart's," Davis said. "It would be known even if it weren't for the initials. Everybody's seen this cap on his head. I hate to believe he had anything to do with it."

"I won't believe it," cried Mary Jane. "Why would he do a thing like that?"

"Not so loud! Not so loud, Mary Jane! Want all these people to hear you? Of course if he took the money he must have had a reason. For instance, he isn't so hot about the war. Maybe he wanted to get out of the country. The draft will be along pretty soon. In Mexico you don't have to wear the uniform if you don't want to."

Anger made the girl's brown eyes deeper than ever. "I won't believe it," she resentfully repeated through clenched teeth. "People haven't been fair to him. He's as good an American as the next. They just pick on him because he has a German name. You're as bad as the rest. Why won't they be fair to him? Now that this has come up—with the feeling against him—anything might happen. He'll be arrested and tried. Maybe a mob, even. The people aren't sane any more. They've gone crazy. War crazy! They may do anything."

"Aw, boy," breathed Amos.

"It's serious all right," Davis admitted.

"What can we do? What can we do? It isn't safe for him to stay and fight it the way people feel now. It isn't safe. I wish he were out of town. Where is he? Where is he now? Do you think we might get him away?"

"Well—it might be a good thing to get him to skip."

"We must do it. We must," Mary Jane continued broken-heartedly as she turned to where the Two Crows stood stupefied by what they had heard.—"Amos, get him out of town for me. Willie will help you. You must do it for me at once."

"Miss Mary Jane, if it's for you, dat boy is jes' de same as gone right now."

"Run then. Quick. Find him and make him go." She was urging them toward the door.

And as Willie and Amos slipped out past the backs of the crowd they noticed she had got Rhinehart's cap away from Davis.

CHAPTER VIII

The Crows Load Freight

Willie and Amos made a bee-line for the freight yards. It was dark now and they hurried along close together. After what had happened they didn't feel safe any more.

Willie broke the silence. "Amos," he said, "you think dat Rhinehart boy done it?"

"Naw. Dat boy's my friend. He wouldn't never do me like dat."

"Den what did you hide his cap for?"

"Dog-gone, boy, you ask more questions dan a cote-house lawyer. I hid the cap 'cause dat boy's my *friend*. And if *was* him whammed me on de haid and tooken dat money, he's still my friend. I know if dey found dat cap it would spell trouble and plenty of it."

"Huh," Willie commented thoughtfully.

Rhinehart wasn't at the railroad station and for a moment the doubting Willie thought he had skipped. But at Amos' suggestion they walked down the tracks toward the water-tank. There, on

a loading platform of considerable length, beside a freight train that had paused to drink they encountered the object of their search. He was walking slowly toward the station, whistling as if this hot night was like all other hot nights, and he was bareheaded as usual. The sight of the wild-eyed Willie and Amos brought him to a sharp standstill, and he dropped his music.

"What the devil's the matter with you two?" Rhinehart demanded. "You look all hot and excited."

"Man!" panted Amos, "ain't you heard yet?"

"Heard what? Have the Germans captured Memphis?"

"Aw, man, be serious! Be serious! Dey's been a robbery. Willie and me was bringing a lot of bank money from de 'spress-office. Somebody jumped on us and tooken all de money. Ten thousand dollars."

"Took it from *you*," Willie reminded him.

Rhinehart gave a long low whistle. "Who do they think did it?"

"You," said Willie. He wasn't much of a diplomatist.

"Me?" The boy gave an incredulous laugh.

"Well," Amos hastened to say, "cose I know you

wouldn't do like dat, and so does Willie. But it look mighty bad, Mister Rhinehart. It sho' do. I ain't foolin'."

"What could make any one think I did it?"

"Well, your cap was found at de scene of de crime. Dat gray-check cap of yours."

Rhinehart ran his fingers through his copper-brown hair which even in the dark seemed to throw off angry sparks. "But they know I go without any hat half the time. Every one knows that. I haven't worn that cap for three days. Left it hanging somewhere. I don't remember where. And even if they did find the cap, they'd have to discover a reason why I'd commit a robbery."

"Well," said the indelicate Willie, "dey's a lot of talk about you not wantin' to go to war. So some folks say you took the money so you could beat it."

"Who said that!"

"Oh, a couple of fellers."

"It looks kinda bad, Mister Rhinehart," Amos put in, "honest it do. Not dat I think it was you tooken the money. But dese folks down South here is mighty hot-haided. Dey all worked up 'count of de war. Cain't tell jest exactly what dey might do. You sho' cain't. Fust dey talk like you

is for the Germans. Now dey excited 'bout dis robbery. So for your own good and safety, we decided you gonna leave town till it all blows over."

Rhinehart was standing wide-legged on the floor of the loading platform. The dim green rays of a switch lamp showed his mouth as a firm straight line. He glared at the Two Black Crows for a moment in silence. The engine at the water-tank, had finished its drink. It gave a long blast that seemed to say it felt a lot better now and was ready to resume its journey.

"So you've decided I'm going to leave town? To run away from this fool charge?"

"Yassir. Dat's what you gonna do."

"Well, I'll do no such a damn' thing! Don't you know that would only be admitting this crazy accusation? I didn't hit any one on the head, and I didn't steal any money. And I'm going to stick right here in town and fight it out. I don't know all the things that people are saying about me and I don't give a damn. But I do know I'm innocent and I'm going to stay here and prove it."

"Nossir," said Amos doggedly. "You leavin' town. We promise Miss Mary Jane we'd see you done dat."

"Mary Jane! Does she believe I did it?"

"Don't know what she believe. But she was afraid people would hurt you or something. She made me and Willie promise to make you leave town, and we want to live up to dis contract. So cose we got to make you do it."

"Well, it would take ten men bigger than you."

Amos realized he was going to have a hard time keeping his promise, but he was equal to the occasion. At this moment the freight near which they were standing got slowly under way with a great clatter and clashing of couplers. It gave Amos his idea. He nudged Willie, jerked his head toward the moving cars and then made signs with his hands toward Rhinehart.

The boy studied Amos' signals doubtfully. "I think this whole town has gone mad," he said, "and I think you two are the goofiest of the lot."

Willie finally comprehended what Amos was trying to tell him. They waited until they saw the gaping black door of an empty moving toward them in the line of cars.

"Here we go, Willie."

At this signal the two seized Rhinehart who now understood their design. He kicked and fought. He yelled and swore with a fluency that could never have been acquired by one so young

in any business except railroading. But the giant strength of Amos, aided by Willie, was too much for him and the growing rattle of the freight train drowned his cries. As the empty car came nearer Amos had one thrashing leg and arm. Willie had corresponding holds on the other side.

"Hey-yo!" Amos sang out.

They swung the squirming Rhinehart once to get the proper rhythm. And as the black open car-door came opposite they pitched him loose. He sailed through the air clutching with both hands and yelling louder than ever. But their aim had been true. He shot through the opening into the slowly moving car and skidded across the splintery floor to the opposite side. While Amos and Willie moved quickly forward, their speed being in unison with that of the train, and before Rhinehart could gather himself together and regain the door, it had been shoved to by the determined pair outside. He heard the clank of the latch and knew he was trapped.

One farewell message came from the outside. Above the growing roar of the wheels he heard Amos' voice through the cracks around the edges of the door.

"I hadder do it. Honest I did. We promise

Miss Mary Jane. And being as I'm your friend I wanted to keep you out of trouble. I'm your friend, Mister Rhinehart. I'll find out who tooken de money. I'll find dat out and——"

But that was the last the prisoner heard. The train was well under way now, and he knew Amos couldn't keep pace with it.

Rhinehart raged about the walls of his bouncing prison. He pulled at the doors until he felt his fingers bleed. He explored all the walls. Long before he gave up he realized that there was no chance of escape. The car had been latched on the outside; it could only be opened from the outside. Everything was against him. He groped for a match to see what time it was and remembered that his last one had been spent on a cigarette. To add to his misery the car was stiflingly hot. It had traveled all day under the blazing summer sun of Mississippi and Tennessee. It seemed to have stored up all the heat poured down on it so that it could become a fireless cooker for its present unwilling passenger. The only ventilation came through cracks around the closed doors.

Rhinehart finally realized that raging about only increased his chances for suffocation. At last he brought his disordered mind into some semblance

of order and tried to get a grip on himself. He sat on the floor with his face near the largest aperture and tried to sleep. But his body had suffered too much insult and his soul too many doubts to permit him to rest.

Now and then during the night sheer exhaustion enabled him to doze a little in spite of the heat and the roar of the train. But wild visions haunted these short interludes. Once he dreamed he was exposed to public view from a steel cage. Davis and Mary Jane strolled by and Davis leered in at him. Through the bars he tried to reach his tormentor with a clenched fist and struck Mary Jane instead. Again, he stood against a wall and faced a firing squad of Germans.

"You can't," he cried. "Stop! Don't you know I'm a German spy?"

But the soldiers only laughed and pulled the triggers.

Finally the interminable night wore through. He was imprisoned on a fast freight, but he could follow the towns pretty well by the stops that were made. There was one for coal and one again for water. At each of these he had cried out and beat on the door with his fists but no one outside paid any attention to him.

CHAPTER IX

Steve Takes the Army

After what seemed a century, a pale gray light seeped through under the car-door and told Rhinehart that day had arrived. He was hungry, tired and aching in every muscle from trying to accommodate himself to the merciless floor of the car. It was early afternoon before the train came to a long stop which Rhinehart took to be its final one. "Probably the yards in East St. Louis," he told himself.

He had to get out, that was all. The heat was now worse than it had been during the night. And his hunger was becoming unbearable. He found half a brick in one corner of his prison. Holding it in his hands he began to pound on the door of the car and shout. These signals he repeated at regular intervals. At last the rattle of the latch told him he had been heard. There was a squeak and a door slid back allowing a welcome flood of fresh air to enter.

But with it came a harsh voice. It said, "Come

outta there, you. And come one at a time if you don't want to get plugged."

Rhinehart showed himself. The direct rays of sunlight beat painfully upon his eyes which had become used to the darkness.

"I'm the only one in here," he managed to say.

As his sight came back he made out a low, square-built, coatless man wearing a derby, and a soldier in full uniform. He did not have to see the badge pinned to the first man's belt to know he was a railroad detective. The soldier was a youngster with all the enthusiasm of a raw recruit. He was there to guard the freight terminals of East St. Louis against the Germans and all other enemies of the republic. He pressed a shiny bayonet painfully close to Rhinehart's shrunken stomach and, looking as tough as possible, he rasped out.

"No foolishness. I'll put a bullet through you."

"Cut it," the detective ordered. He didn't care whether Rhinehart got the bullet or not; but he did resent the high-handed way these kid soldiers tried to take over all the authority. Rhinehart had sense enough to stand still and wait in silence.

"Well," the older man said at last, "out with it. What the hell are you doing in that car? And how did you lock the door on the outside?"

Rhinehart had already decided what tack to take. "I'm on the bum," he said, "hopped this freight at Cairo. Closed the door too tight and the train shook the latch so it locked."

"Yeah? Well, it don't take no detective to see you're on the bum. A guy could take one look at you and tell that."

Which was true. A night in the box-car had made a different person out of Rhinehart. He was bareheaded. Also he had accumulated a light reddish beard. Dirt from the car had grimed his face. He was in shirt-sleeves. Grease and cinders had dirtied his clothes and they had been torn during the night by nails on the floor and walls of the car.

Nature tells us that animals take on the color and appearance of their environment. Here was support for the theory. By traveling one night as a hobo travels, Rhinehart had taken on the appearance of a habitual tramp.

"Keep the gun on him," the detective said to the soldier. "I'm gonna frisk him."

With the skill of long experience he went through Rhinehart's pockets. The search disclosed one open-faced railroad watch, a pocket knife, a handkerchief and eighty-five cents in change. In answer to the detective's question Rhinehart said:

"I didn't steal that watch from any one. It's mine."

"Yeah? Well, you can tell that and whatever else you got to say to the judge. I'll just keep these valuables for the present."

And as far as Rhinehart knows the detective is keeping them to this day because he never saw them again.

Having proved to himself that the boy was unarmed, the detective told the soldier he might as well go back to his post. He would take in the prisoner. And after a long hot walk, Rhinehart found himself in a cell at a police station. Next morning he stood in a dingy little police court-room and faced a tired old judge. The magistrate looked down on the prisoner and said:

"You are charged with vagrancy and trespassing on railroad property. What have you got to say for yourself? Guilty or not guilty?"

"Guilty."

"That's all?"

"Yes, sir. Guilty."

The magistrate looked at him more closely. It was not usual for a prisoner to accept his fate so readily. Maybe he deserved more consideration than his appearance indicated.

"I fine you thirty days in jail." The boy's guard made a step forward. But the judge continued and he stopped. "I fine you thirty days in jail, but I am going to give you a chance. You are young and you probably won't look so desperate when you get shaved and washed up. I suspend your sentence on condition that you join the army. They need men at the front more than we need 'em in our jail. What do you say? Thirty days in jail, or the United States Army."

"I'll take the army, Judge."

"All right. Next case."

That same afternoon an officer of the court took the boy to a recruiting station where he left him after he was safely enrolled in the service. Rhinehart enlisted under the name of Charles Miller.

As soon as he could borrow a paper and pencil he wrote a letter to Mary Jane. He recounted how he had been kidnapped and locked on the train by Amos and Willie who said they did it at her direction. He was sure that she had done it for his sake. He described his experience in court and told her that the people who had doubted him in Buford could not doubt him any more. He was in the army at last.

He wrote: "Once out of town I realized that my

disappearance would be taken as a confession of guilt. And if I came back even now that idea could not be entirely overcome. People would only think I had changed my mind and returned to face the music."

He added that she must not let any one know where his letter was from—that he was taking a chance on writing it. But his future was so uncertain and his love for her was so deep that he could not go on without one last word to her. He was in the army under an assumed name. In a few months he would probably be in France. Whatever happened, he wanted her to know that he would always keep her in his heart.

At the moment he was writing this letter in East St. Louis, Lieutenant Ashley Davis was standing on the floor of the West Tennessee Vehicle Company down in Buford. He was looking over a snappy, battle-gray roadster that had just arrived from Detroit. The machine appealed to him, and he told the elderly agent to send it around to his house next day for a demonstration.

The merchant eagerly agreed. He had known Davis all his life, and as he walked to the door with him, rubbing his hands, he said jokingly:

"Didn't know you could buy cars on army pay."

"You can't," frowned Davis.

"Guess you been hitting the cotton market pretty lucky lately, Ash."

Davis did not reply, but he lowered the lid of his left eye. The wink was taken as an admission that the guess was correct.

For the first time in years, Davis had so much money that he had to be cautious about spending it. By knocking Amos senseless and taking the bank's ten thousand dollars, he had been able to pay off a threatening broker in Memphis and to make a reduction on that insistent note at the bank. Also, his nefarious strategy had removed from town a dangerous rival for the hand of Mary Jane.

That night Davis recounted the stolen bills in his closed room. A sudden noise made him look up. He caught sight of his own face in the mirror, but he was manifestly unable to look himself in the eye.

As his gaze dropped back to the green and yellow bills he shrugged his uniformed shoulders. "Oh, what the devil!" he explained to himself. "I'm going across pretty soon. They'll shove us right through to the front. Fritz may get me early. Better live while you can."

With this typical bit of war philosophy he resumed his counting.

CHAPTER X

Personally Invited to the War

Excitement over the robbery lasted for several weeks, but it finally waned when the thief was not caught. Also the war news became more engrossing. It was certain now that the Germans were massing for a grand attack on the Western Front, timing their smash before Americans in any numbers could reach the battle-fields.

When the National Guard Company was ordered to entrain for camp the activities of Lieutenant Davis redoubled. He hardly had time to referee the debates at the corner of the Red Cross Drug Store. One fresh cool morning he flashed by Amos and Willie, who sat on the Main Street curb extremely busy in their favorite pastime of doing nothing. Davis was in his new battle-gray roadster and Mary Jane sat beside him.

"Aw-aw," Amos said, "good thing de Kaiser man can't see dat old Davis boy! He'd up and stop de war."

"Jest de same," retorted Willie, "looks like

he's going to grab off Miss Mary Jane 'fore he leaves."

"Yeah? Well, dat's all you know 'bout it. You think all women is like dese brown and black babies dat's always giving you de air. I know Miss Mary Jane diffunt. I sho' do. I got kitchen infohmation. Camilla say sometimes when she go to make up dat little girl's bed de pillow is all wet. She's still thinking and wondering about dat Rhinehart boy."

"Use your brain, boy! Don't you know women hop from one man to another like a bee in a clover field? Soldier boy in uniform make Miss Mary Jane disremember all about who Rhinehart was."

Amos refused to believe that. But there were many in Buford who took Willie's view. The tall Davis cut a handsome figure in his uniform and the fact that he had been called to war created an even more romantic glamour about him. It is a well-proved law of warfare that on equal terms a civilian has little chance with a girl against a uniformed fighting man.

There came a solemn, soggy, rainy morning when the boys of the Guard Company splashed their way through the streets to the depot and entrained for camp. Efforts were expended to make

a gay event of it, but there was much weeping and hysteria. Flags and bunting that had been flung out in honor of the departing fighters clung soaked and bedraggled about poles and lamp-posts. That these youngsters would soon be in France was certain. One wondered as one saw them tramp by with their measured rhythm who among them would find graves in foreign earth.

The town band played *Over There* under the dripping eaves of the little station. The engineer pulled the whistle cord. From every window protruded heads that grinned uncertainly. Hands waved peaked army caps. The train was moving amid cheers from the cars and platform.

Davis was the last to leap on. He had been talking to Mary Jane, and as the train pulled out he seized her and gave her a fervent farewell kiss. All saw it but were unable to determine whether or not it was received reluctantly on her part.

The shrinking end of the last coach disappeared with its khaki-clad figures around the curve at the Confederate Cemetery. The crowd at the station slowly returned through the melancholy rain to their sorrowful homes.

Not long after this the first draft contingent entrained for Camp Gordon. The colored members

of the quota were in high spirits. They hung far out the car windows, laughing and carrying on as only colored people can carry on before they go somewhere on a train. The event had taken on all the elements of an excursion with the added attraction that the government was footing the bill. Admonitions and jokes volleyed back and forth between the embryo soldiers in the windows and the folk on the ground.

One inky little draft victim with a mouthful of white teeth sang out:

"Well, if there ain't Amos and Willie. Hello, defectives!"

A great laugh went up from the cars. Others took up the cry, "Hello, defectives."

"Flat wheels can't roll wid us."

Amos and Willie grinned sheepishly. Whereat the drafted ones, seeing that "goats had been got," made it stronger than ever.

"Better git dem flat feet fixed and jine the army," yelled a fat boy the color of French mustard. "Dem dat don't git in de army gonna have to work for us dat is."

"Dassa fack. Gotta git in de army or start sweatin'."

"Wear uniform and take your ease."

"Good grub and no work, Amos."

"Git dem feet repaired, Big Boy!"

"Stretch yourself, Willie. Maybe you can make de grade."

The "razzing" became so general that Amos and Willie were glad when the band blared out *Dixie* and drowned the jeering voices. The victims finally managed to slip away unnoticed.

And now for the first time, the two had their doubts. Maybe it wasn't so bad in the army as they feared. Certainly those boys now pulling out were having a good time. Free train rides and free "vittles."

"Willie," Amos ventured, "supposin' we done ourselves wrong when we got out of de draft? Supposin' huh?"

"I think it don't make no diffunce whether you went in or not. From what all dem doctors said about your feet you couldn't never get in no army."

"Dassa fack." And Amos looked down at the generous members which were now carrying him reluctantly toward home.

Being human, Amos was indulging in a mental change. As long as they came after him, made him register in the books and told him they were going

to make him get into the army, he did not want to do it. But now that he had been through the mill and was "ejected," he began to think that joining the army might be the very thing he needed most.

This feeling was strengthened when he left Willie and arrived at his home. Bingo welcomed him with boisterous affection, but a dog can't peel potatoes. Camilla was thumping furiously at her ironing-board. Small rivulets of sweat ran down her black face. The heat made her more domineering than ever.

"Where you been at?" she demanded, thrusting forward her heavy under lip with its protruding snuff brush.

"Jest seein' some soldier boys off on de train. Dass all."

"Umph! Iffen you had a grain of spunk you'd be in wid de fighting boys like what Sergeant Skip is."

"Yeah, but my feet won't let me."

"You said it, boy. If you ever did git up where dem Germans is, your feet would take you away so fast you'd have to push de bullets out of your way."

"Aw, sugar, have a heart."

"Don't think you can flatter me, boy, callin'

me sweet names. I'm goin' to be quinine to you 'fore I'm through. What'd you do wid dat four bits?"

"Why, what four bits, honey?"

"Dat four bits you tooken from under de coffee-pot where I hid it."

"Dey been a lot of burglars round lately and I speck——"

"You can lie, boy, but I can see right through dat head of yourn. You got my money and tooken it down to de Catfish house and you lost it in a crap game to dat no-'count triflin' Willie, like you do wid all de money you get."

"Naw, I didn't, sweetness." But his tone and his attitude were a plain confession of the indictment.

"No good at gambling, even. Well, one thing you can do and it's more'n time you got at it." She pointed.

There by the sagging hickory-bottomed chair was a sack of hated potatoes, the paring knife, and a dish-pan with water in it. Stifling the rebellion that rose in his soul, Amos picked up the knife and started a long snaky peeling. As he worked he wondered whether German bullets hurt very much when they hit you.

Next morning he effected his daily escape and

joined Willie. Together they walked across the Court-House Square. Near the monument to General Forrest a novelty arrested their gaze and feet.

It was a layout of army photographs and recruiting posters. The pictures were in four colors. The subject was treated in a brilliance beyond anything the Two Black Crows had ever seen before,—beyond circus posters even. They showed handsome young men in the uniforms and buttons of the United States Army riding up green slopes on horses any one of which would have won a blue ribbon at a Blue-Grass horse-show. In another scene equally magnificent animals were galloping gaily across a plain with field-guns and artillery men behind them. A third showed infantrymen lolling about a golden shore of a purple sea, shaded by the generous fronds on an extremely green palm-tree.

The figures were all dressed in flawless uniforms. From the expressions on the faces of the picture soldiers it was evident that they would not exchange this care-free life in the cloth of Uncle Sam for anything fortune could offer.

Amos and Willie examined the pictures with wide eyes. They were fascinated by a photo of high officers attending some great function. The resplendent uniforms were enough to make any

lodge member turn green with envy. Amos indicated with a black finger a colonel of marines.

"Dass the kind of soldier I'd like to be. Doggone, boy, dat's what I call a suit of clothes."

"Dis one here's one I like better." Willie had his index finger on the bosom of an infantry brigadier. "Dem sho' is clothes, Amos. Look at de fit of dat suit! And de stripe running down his pants leg."

"Dem's all white boys in de pictures. Maybe we couldn't get in an army like dat."

As if in answer to their question a voice spoke up behind them.

"You young men like to join up?" it asked.

Willie and Amos wheeled to confront a picture of martial power. It was a black recruiting sergeant who was plainly attached to the poster display. He was not so tall as Amos, but he had a chest on him like a molasses barrel and shoulders that a gorilla would have been proud of. There was a disappointing bow to his huge legs, but to the initiated that would have meant he was an old timer with divers enlistments to his credit. In the 9th or 10th Cavalry perhaps, for the arc of his crooked knees would just about encompass one of those sassy little army horses. Willie and Amos

gazed upon him in silent admiration. Colored girls passing cast warm looks in the stranger's direction.

"You young men like to join de army?" this military paragon repeated.

"We wouldn't wish to." It was Willie who spoke.

"Then I sho' feel sorry for you."

"Sorry for us?" demanded Amos. "How come you feel dat way?"

"Well, of course you know dey are going to draft labor. Boys dat don't want to fight are goin' to have to work, whether dey want to or not. News just got to me from Washington."

"Dat don't affeck me none," Amos observed.

"How's dat?"

"Let 'em draft laborers. I ain't no laborer. Anybody in dis town can tell you I retired from working years ago. I'm a rester. Dass what I am."

The recruiting sergeant regarded him sorrowfully and shook his head.

"Big Boy, I didn't know dere was anybody as igerunt as you in all dis world. You may be a rester now, but when Uncle Sam lay hands on you, you gonna reform your ways. When he tells you to work, you'll work or else he'll put a boy behind you wid a bayonet pointed at the seat of

your pants. Every time boss man tells you to work and you don't do it you'll git stung wid de weapons. Boy, did you ever get stung wid a bayonet?"

"No, I cain't say as I ever did."

"Well, best way to give you an idea is this: You just imagine a bumblebee as big as an elephant." The speaker paused to allow them thus to enlarge a bee in their imaginations. "A bumblebee as big as an elephant. Now, imagine what a stinger a bumblebee dat size is got. Den jest imagine what it would feel like to have him stab you wid his stinger and you got some idea what it feels like to git stuck with a U. S. Army bayonet."

"Sounds mighty bad," admitted Willie.

"Bad? Boy, I'm tellin' you, when dey draft you you may not be much of a worker, but 'fore dey get through, labor will be your one desire."

"Dat listens brutal," breathed Amos.

He recalled that yesterday at the depot one of Henpeck's colored contributions to the war yelled down at him something about being drafted for labor. It was disturbing enough to think of having to fight; the prospect of being made to work brought beads of cold sweat to his forehead.

"Here, listen, army man," Amos said at last.

"We cain't git in de army. We cain't git in if we want to. We already been took in de draft and been ejected out."

"Have I tried to get you into de army?" demanded the sergeant.

"Well—you didn't make no special invitation. You didn't do dat. But you ain't talked 'bout nothing else but de army since we been standin' here. Is you, now?"

"Sure. But I was only telling you what dey were going to do about drafting you boys and making you work. I never said we wanted you in de army. Don't you know we're mighty partickler who we let in dis army? Mighty partickler. You got to be a good man to get into our army. But when dey come to drafting you for labor, dey're going to take you if you got strength enough to lift a pick."

Willie had been doing some fast thinking. "Hey," he demanded, "you talk like being in the army's a sort of Baptist picnic."

"Naw. I ain't said it was a picnic. But we have a mighty good time. And practically no work."

"How 'bout all this brutal talk?" Amos demanded. "How 'bout dat?"

The sergeant rocked back on the heels of his broad army shoes and laughed. Then he glanced

about to see if any one was listening. Having assured himself that he was not overheard he put one arm about Amos' shoulder, the other about Willie's and drew their heads close to his.

"Listen," he whispered, "you seem to be a couple of regular fellas and I'm going to let you in on something. Cose dere is a lot of loose talk about how tough life is in de army. I admit dat. But dat's jest proper-gander."

"What kind of gander?" whispered Amos.

"Proper-gander. Dat means something you tell people when you want to fool 'em. See? With this new order from President Wilson dat we got to draft labor we had to do something to keep de army from getting overcrowded. We had to talk it around dat it was a hard life so de boys wouldn't stampede into our ranks to keep out of working."

This sounded perfectly logical to Amos. "What's it like in de army?" he asked, lowering his voice so a passing colored boy could not hear him.

"Well, de army is like a good lodge. Like dat only better. Fustly, you don't have to buy your own uniform, secondly, dey feeds you good food and gives you a fine place to sleep, and thirdly,"—he paused for better effect,—"thirdly, dey pay you a dollar a day. Jest for dice money and et ceteras."

"But whatta you do in de army?"

"Do? You don't do nothing. Maybe some people git tired doing nothing all de time so dey give you light entertainment as you might say. If everybody feel like doing it we dress up in de uniforms and trot out de band and holds a peerade. Jest like it was a lodge. Our army ain't always hounding you and pestering you to make you do things. Ginerally you just eat hot vittles three times a day, wear good clothes, lay around, and shoot dice. Dey make de band play to keep it cheerful and homelike."

"Yeah. But how 'bout fighting dem Germans?"

"Why, you ain't scared of a few Germans, is you?"

"Naw. I ain't scared of 'em. And dey ain't scared of me neither. If I got over where dey was at they'd shoot me just as quick as they'd shoot anybody else."

"You look like you'd enjoy violence."

"Aw, I don't mind a friendly rumpus now and den. When I'm worked up, nothing I like better dan to ply my razor. But I ain't mad at no Germans."

"Boy, how dumb you is! Did I say you'd have to fight?"

"Naw, you didn't say so. But everybody down dis part of de country's got de idea dat's what a army does—fights!"

"Sure dat's de general impression. But I done told you we spread bad talk around to keep undesirables out of de army. Step in close now. I'm going to pass you something I don't want to go any further."

Amos and Willie bent each an ear toward the beguiler. In a low dramatic undertone he assured them that it was arranged that the white soldiers would have to handle all the fighting. Didn't they know President Linkum wrote that in the book when he set all the colored folks free? In two minutes this uniformed go-getter had Willie and Amos so hot for army life that they would have paid him to enroll them.

"Much as I'd like to," the sergeant finished, "I don't see how I can make room for you two. Applications are rolling in something scandalous. Dere's thousands ahead of you. I'll do what I can. But understand I make no promise."

The Two Crows were deeply crestfallen.

"Well," Willie spoke up, "you ought to be able to take care of me. If you can't get us both in, maybe you can accommodate one of us."

"Him!" sneered Amos. "Look at his size! People would laugh at dat little sawed-off in one of dem swell yeller uniforms. What you need is fine, big, upstanding men like I is."

"You heard tell about Napoleon Boneypart, ain't you?" Willie demanded. "He was de greatest soldier ever lived. And he was littler dan me even. 'Sides, Amos, how you gonna git in de army with dem feet. Didn't de doctors tell you dey were too flat for military purposes?"

The recruiting sergeant took a bird's-eye view of the members in question. He had seen feet in his day but never any to equal these. He whistled his amazement.

"Maybe I can fix it," he said at last. "You got a couple of awful handicaps on you, boy. But I got a drag with the doctor men, and I'll see can I help you through."

CHAPTER XI

Amos Burns with Patriotism

When they parted from the wily sergeant, Amos and Willie had their names down as volunteers for the United States Army and were instructed to appear before a local examiner the next day.

They busied themselves the rest of the day at their favorite pastime of doing nothing. They lolled in the sunshine; they talked of the pleasant future before them in the easy-going army; they dozed if conversation lagged. When the town clock informed Amos it was about time for Camilla to reach home with the day's collection of food, he stretched himself and invited Willie to supper.

"Provided," he added to the invitation.

"Provided what?"

"Provided Camilla don't throw us out."

As they got near the ramshackle cabin a strident and angry voice assailed their ears. It was Camilla calling to her mate. Amos had wanted an ally more than a supper guest.

"Come on in, Willie," he urged. "She'd just love to see you."

"Sho' she would," agreed Willie; "she'd just love to see me 'cause two pussons is easier to hit dan one. Friendship is one thing, Amos, but common sense is something diffunt. Her voice done took my appetite right out from under me." And with these emphatic remarks, Willie merged his complexion into the gathering darkness.

"Who dat you laughing and carrying on wid?" was Camilla's first blast.

"Just Willie. But we wasn't laughing."

He was late as usual and Camilla made him undress his usual quota of potatoes before she would allow him to eat. Meanwhile she beguiled her mate with another letter from her former boy friend, the sergeant.

"He's over in de battling now. On de morning befo' he wrote he say he killed four German generals, five kernels, half a dozen captains and one private soldier. He got de private by mistake cause he don't waste no bullets on common soldiers lessen de shootin' gets awful bad."

Amos had news to break but he had been saving it. But when he picked up an unusually robust potato and ran his knife under its hateful hide, he decided to speak out. Said he:

"Cose I don't doubt what de sergeant say if it's

down on paper in black and white. But some of de white boys helpin' him with de war must be falling down something painful."

"What you talkin' 'bout, No-'Count?"

"Well, ole Uncle Sam done sent a man down here to ask me personal to join up wid de army and help 'em out. Dat's what I mean. Man say somebody messed de fightin' up and he asked if I wouldn't go over and see what I could do. He wants me in de army, awful bad."

"What'd you tell dis man?"

"Fust I tell him I couldn't be a soldier 'cause I got a kind and loving wife dependent on me." Camilla gave a contemptuous snort. "But he kept on begging so hard I saw whereat my duty was. I told him I'd step to de front and join up. Dat's what I told him. I'm bound for de war."

"Useless, I'm getting tired of your lying. And I'm getting tired massagin' dis washboard and toting home vittles to support your carcass in peace and luxury. You laying around here wasting good air while my friend over in France is up to his neck in Germans. You do all your fightin' wid your mouth."

The prospect of breaking into the army had already roused Amos' dormant spirit of rebellion.

Now the injustice of her doubts stung him into action. It was time he asserted himself in his own house. Rising to his full height he threw down the knife and dropped a half-disclosed potato.

"Listen here, gal," he cried, "I tooken all off you I'm gonna take. I done volunteered to be a soldier same as I said, and I'm starting to ack like one now. You don't make me peel no more potatoes. You don't——"

"You listen, Calamity," Camilla cut in. "Right here and now I'm going to declare personal war on you. And when I get finished you'll want to join de army for peace and protection."

Her last word was punctuated with a heavy cup that crashed against the wall dangerously close to Amos' left ear. Other items of household goods followed it through the air. Amos' rebellion was of short duration. When the barrage weakened for lack of furnishings he made a dive for the door and reached the merciful safety of outer darkness.

Willie was kind enough to lend him six feet of his bedroom floor for the rest of the night.

Next morning Willie was rocked with doubts. Could they be sure of what the recruiting sergeant had told them? Was he sure the president was going to draft men and make 'em work?

"Maybe we better go slow," he cautioned Amos.

"Dog-gone, boy, how you talk! Bachelors don't seem to understand nothing 'tall. Was you married you wouldn't take other things so serious. All dat recrooting man said may not be gospel truth, but ain't no doubt what Camilla told me. I got to get into de army for my own good."

At the appointed time they presented themselves to the white doctors for their second examination. The wily sergeant was there, as he had promised, to use whatever influence he possessed in behalf of Amos' feet.

But the handicap proved too great. Again the doctors assured Amos that he would be a valuable asset to a museum of foot complaints, but the army couldn't use him. The awful feeling that attacked the pit of his stomach at the news was heightened when he saw Willie emerge.

"Old feet tripped me up again," groaned Amos. "White men say dey can use me only if I leave my feet behind. What dey tell you, Willie?"

There was an answering groan from his friend. "Aw, man, I'm in de army now. Stead of squattin' like I did for de draft doctors, I stretched. And man said I was a perfeck spessimen. They took me quick."

"What we gonna do now, Willie?"

It was an appalling situation. Willie hadn't cared about getting into the army anyhow. A brace of high-school dice and the admiration of divers females had kept him in small change and pleasurable diversions. Now here he was, roped into the army and headed for distant uncertainties. On the other hand, Amos, who really needed an escape into army life, was going to be left behind.

The crowning misfortune was that the two would now be parted. They, the Two Black Crows, Henpeck's most famous and successful combination in restraint of effort, were going to be severed, separated and abolished.

"You got me into this," Willie accused. He was almost in tears.

"Now, now, now! Don't take it so hard, Willie. I ain't give up yet. Every time I think about staying back here where Camilla is, I burn wid patriotism, I'll go wid you, Willie. I sho' will."

"Boy, you can't do that."

"You lay low and say nothing. I'll go wid you or else . . . If I can't volunteer my way into de army, I'll bust my way in."

And it proved to be simple, this crashing into the army.

CHAPTER XII

Crashing into the Army

When the colored volunteers left for camp there was a repetition of the send-offs that had been given other outfits. The recruits, a rather dazed-looking bunch, had been gathered from surrounding small towns. Such obscure settlements as Tiger Tail, Boone Creek and Tiptoe were represented. There was the usual milling and excitement about the flag-draped depot. The band played, people cheered, the mayor addressed a stirring farewell to the "heroic colored legions who will repay with their valor the blood and sacrifice that made them free."

Mary Jane was there. She looked thinner and some people said she was working too hard, and others said she was grieving. This time she had brought down in her roadster boxes of lunch for the departing colored heroes. Having passed them around she got Amos to one side.

"You're going with them, aren't you, Amos?"

Amos glanced around to make sure he wasn't overheard. "Yassum. I calcalate to."

"Take this with you then." She handed him a letter. "Put it inside your coat." Amos complied. "Now don't let any one see it. It's for Steve—Mr. Rhinehart if you ever run across him. Remember, it's for Steve and no one else."

"Yassum. I'll see he gets it or nobody does."

"Thank you, Amos. Here's a good-by present for you." She pressed something into his palm and was gone in the crowd. Amos found, when he could examine the gift in private, that it was a five-dollar bill.

The confusion doubled. People cheered and yelled. Whistles blew and bells joined in. The cars began to move. Some one yelled.

"All aboard for France! Get on, everybody!"

There was a scramble for the steps. The engine gave a wild excited screech and began to gather speed. Another contingent of Buford's man-power was on its way toward the distant battle-lines.

They traveled all that day, all the next night and all the following day. Even boys who had never been known to leave a train without protest got sick and tired of riding. Some thought they had come so far that they were liable to bump into Germans at any minute. The wildest tales ran up and down the aisles. They shot craps. They sang

religious hymns. A boy who had been in the army before introduced that famous classic of the service:

"You're in the army now,
You're not behind the plow,
You'll never get rich,
You'll get the itch,
You're in the army now!"

And still they traveled. Willie began to think that if the world was round, as he had heard people say, they were soon going to come back to Buford from the opposite direction. For the thousandth time he asked the sergeant in charge of the contingent:

"How much farther is it, Big Boy?"

And for the thousandth time the answer was a disheartening. "You ain't even started yet, Shorty."

However on the second evening they arrived at their destination. It was night when they got in. Endless lines of lights made the place more mysterious and appalling than it would have been in daytime. They had reached a vast camp in the pines and sand-hills of New Jersey. What Tennessee troops were doing in a camp so far from home, you will have to ask those who sent them there.

Stranger things than that happened while the war was on.

"All out," a bull-throated sergeant yelled.

Tired, cramped and subdued by the strangeness surrounding them, the colored volunteers poured down the steps, lugging battered bags, "telescopes," bundles and boxes. They made a most unmilitary appearance to the curious sentries who paced back and forth with bayonets on their sloping Springfields.

Considerable effort was required to get them strung out in the semblance of a column. They marched through the high wire fence under the clattering arc lights, no man in all the band keeping step with any other. At last the sweating sergeants lined them up before a long, low, wooden building from which presently debouched two white officers.

One was a fat little captain with round red cheeks, the other a lanky major with a hard wide jaw and piercing blue eyes. They watched in silence while a baffled sergeant tried to unravel his records. He called the roll. He counted and recounted the submissive colored boys. Then he scratched his head, swore to himself and called the roll all over. Plainly there was something wrong.

"What's the matter, Sergeant?" demanded the fat little captain.

"We got too many, sir," was the answer, "I've counted and counted 'em. I can't be mistaken."

He turned to give the rookies their first taste of army profanity. He bawled them to a fare-you-well. After exhausting his invective upon the personalities present, he went painfully into their parentage. The waiting line trembled in its several respective boots. That extra man was going to catch hell when he was discovered.

The lanky major did not smile with his mouth, but the corners of his sharp blue eyes crinkled ever so little. He had a helpful suggestion.

"Call the roll once more, Sergeant. Let every man step two paces forward as he answers to his name."

The angry non-com went through the roster again. In his exasperation he barked the names so threateningly that each man jumped forward when he was called as if some one had stuck him with a pin. The plan was successful in discovering the error.

Standing alone in the rear of his comrades, Amos was revealed as the troublesome surplus. He didn't know what was coming, but he waited for it

in what he considered a proper military attitude. He was in a state of complete rigidity. In his determination to hold himself straight he leaned back so far that he was in danger of toppling at any moment. The only movement was with his eyeballs. These he fastened on the white officers in mute and touching appeal.

The furious sergeant was stopped by a motion from the major who spoke to the problem.

"Come here, boy."

Amos was galvanized into eager action. He made a straight course for the major. The fact that he had to burst through the ranks of the legitimate recruits did not retard him any. He knew that when you run into trouble the best plan is to ignore your own color and make for some boss white man.

"Here I is, Boss." And he executed a military salute which came dangerously near ending with a thumb in his right eye.

The major regarded him sternly. Amos felt the chill of the blue eyes that ran over him from his battered hat to his oversize shoes.

Watching from the ranks the frightened Willie breathed a silent prayer for his friend. He had heard they were very careless about shooting people in the army.

"Boy," the major said to Amos, at last, "did you enlist?"

"Yassir, Boss."

"And did you take the physical examination? Did the doctors look over you?"

"Yassir, Cap'n."

"What did they tell you?"

"Cap'n, sir, dey said I was strong as a lion but my feet was impossible."

"They ruled you out on account of your feet?"

"Yassir, Cap'n."

"Then what the hell are you doing here?"

"Cap'n, sir, I was down at de deepo when a white man say, 'All you boys get on.' And here I is."

"Would you like to get into the army?"

"Cap'n, sir, I don't want nothing else."

"Why? Hiding out on account of some crime?"

"Lawd, nossir! I'm a good Baptist boy, I is. Left a good home and a kind and lovin' wife. She cried and asked me not to go but I know 'twasn't right for me to live happy and care-free whilst other boys was battling wid dem Germans. I tore myself loose from my wife and tole her I had to do my duty."

"Such patriotism as yours deserves reward. I'll see what I can do for you. Take 'em, Sergeant."

CHAPTER XIII

Temporary Willie

Amos never found out how the major worked it, but work it he did. Again the doctors made him strip to his coal black hide and went over him with lamps and devices such as doctors use. But they ignored his feet. In due course he was enrolled with the rank and pay of private.

He and Willie were conferred upon Company B Third Battalion of a Pioneer Infantry Regiment. Sitting on his bunk, Willie wrote down on Y. M. C. A. paper with a borrowed pencil the main facts about their enlistment. He was sending the news to one of several girls he had left behind him in Henpeck. Puzzled by the military terminology, he called across the room to a ten-day veteran from Alabama whose six-foot length lay stretched on a distant cot:

"Hey you, Doremus, what kind of army is dis me and Amos is in?"

Doremus raised a mottled yellow face crowned by sandy red hair. "You're in a Pine-Ear Infantry outfit," said he.

"Pine-Ear Infantry? What do dat mean, Doremus?"

"Infantry means soldiers what do dey fightin' and runnin' on foot; and you gonna need ears made out of pine when you get up to de old battle-front where all de racket is."

Amos, listening, laughed. "I see you is one of dem boys like to joke and carry on."

"Joke?" repeated Doremus, turning a solemn face on them. "I'm a serious man, I am. An elder in the church. Dis ain't no jokin' business, dis war ain't. You jest disturb me from my prayers and meditations. I been washing and cleaning my soul and putting it in good order. I'd advise you-all to quit your dicing and worldliness and do de same."

"Why?" asked Amos.

" 'Cause we liable to be launched on de ocean for dem battle-fields at a moment's notice. Pine-Ear Infantry will be on de way to France maybe before any other outfit. How is *your* soul, boy?"

Willie and Amos exchanged a frightened glance. Their souls were for the moment suffering acutely.

"Recrooting sergeant tole us we wouldn't have to go to war and he say we don't have to do any fighting," Willie ventured in a wan voice.

The devout Doremus shook his head and sighed. "Dem recrooters," he murmured, "dey promise anything just so dey lure into your uniform. Iffen you boys think you not gonna partake in dis here war you sho' is been misled. De Angel of Death is sharpenin' up his old scythe blade. Git right wid your soul, Brother. Git right wid your soul."

Hasty inquiry proved that Doremus was right in his estimate of the outlook. The outfit was being organized to go across as soon as possible, and its work would be up in the danger zone. The news disheartened Willie so that he couldn't finish his letter.

They were yet to discover how deep could be the perfidy of a recruiting sergeant whose only business is beguiling the unsuspecting into the ranks of the heroes. The second disillusion smote them when they appeared at the supply sergeant's window and demanded uniforms. A hard black veteran with bristling white mustache presided over this activity. He did not even ask Amos what size he wanted. Instead he ran a practised eye over the applicant and started shoving things out through the window.

Amos took one look at the garments and registered emphatic complaint.

"Heah, heah!" he protested. "What's dese?"

"Your army clothes, soldier. Take 'em and shut your trap."

"Aw, man, you can't deceive me like dat. You can't do dat."

"Do what, Big Boy?" the supply sergeant's voice was ominously quiet.

"Why, you can't gimme old fuzzy brown suit like dissen here. I wouldn't wear dese clothes to a second-rate dog-fight. Boy, I sho' would not."

It took the supply sergeant some time to regain his voice.

"I guess you want to go down to the tailor and order you a uniform like the major wears?"

"Naw, I wouldn't put de army to dat trouble. But de man dat got us into the army showed pictures of what de uniforms was like. And I gotta have one like he promised. One I picked out was sorta dark blue, wid a wide yaller stripe down de pants leg, and gold buttons all over it. Gimme one like dat, Big Boy."

"And supposin' we don't give you clothes like that?"

"Well, I cain't work for no army dat don't do me fair and right. I'll resign and go back home."

"Soldier," said the sergeant solemnly, "you

know how people go home when they resign from this man's army? They go home by express in a nice wooden overcoat wid handles. And the kinfolks plant 'em down in the ground. They ain't no more use around the house. Furthermore and additional I ain't got time to waste holding up the line joking here with you." He was rolling up the shoddy khaki uniform in a compact ball. "Boy, here comes your soldier clothes. Take 'em."

Amos took them on his ear. While he was wondering whether he had better carry his protest higher, he received his army shoes. They came sailing from the hand of the supply sergeant and they struck sparks from Amos' head when they hit. An eleven and a half brogan on a half-inch sole studded with hobnails is no mean weapon.

But the supply sergeant was to see him again. Amos appeared once more in the line and in answer to the glare on the other side of the window he complained.

"Boy, I cain't use dese shoes. Dey pinch and pain my feet." So saying he passed back the offending brogans.

"Can't wear 'em!" the sergeant was incredulous until he looked down at Amos' sock-covered feet. He was awed by the pedal expanse below him.

"See for yourself."

"Well, the army can't build shoes special just for you."

"And I cain't go to war barefooted."

Suddenly the sergeant had an idea. He reached far back on a top shelf and brought down an incredible pair of shoes. They had evidently been made for a window display, for no sane manufacturer could expect customers with so much foot size. On a guess, they were about a number fifteen, on an Nth width. The sergeant blew the dust off and handed them out to the complaining Amos.

"See if you can get these on," he directed.

Amos bent down and slipped the prodigies over his sox. They hung on obstructions here and there, but they went on. He rose and tried first one and then the other with his weight. A look of perfect comfort spread over his face.

"Dem's fine, Sarge. Fit me like a glove."

The new soldier had to admit defeat as to the uniform. It was plain that all the other soldiers about the camp were dressed in depressing shoddy similar to that so violently issued to him. The result of his change to army clothes had a very discouraging effect.

"Boy," said Willie, walking round his friend and

surveying the disastrous results, "you don't look nothing like de picture de recrooting sergeant showed us at de Court-House."

"Maybe I don't," Amos admitted, "but you ain't no military glory yourself."

Back in the good old days of knighthood men joined an army for the plumes and fine clothes it allowed them to wear. Amos and Willie had been drawn by a similar lure—the irresistible posters, the brilliant pictures of army life, the intriguing words of the clever recruiting sergeant. Could anything be more desirable? But, alas, what a rude awakening!

Their blouses were too short, the tails allowing a large and baggy expanse of breeches seat to swing in the breeze. The canvas leggings were too brief and the shoes were built on the lines of sand scows, being designed for wear and walking rather than comeliness.

The peaked hats weren't so bad to look at, but the supply sergeants lost no sleep over fittings. Willie's issue of millinery had him walking in darkness half the time, while that of Amos was some two sizes shy. By swapping about the men were able to bring their hats and heads into closer agreement.

Company B finally got to sleep in the barracks room lined with its long rows of wooden cots. It seemed to Amos that his head had hardly touched the straw lump that served him as a pillow when a noise outside routed his slumbers. Somebody was blowing loudly and insistently on a horn. There was an answering stir about him but he paid no mind to it. If others wanted to get up like this before daylight he would not argue with them.

"Must be a fire or something," he muttered to himself. "Let 'em go. I don't own no houses here."

He had just sunk into a refreshing oblivion when a hand as hard as iron seized his shoulder and shook it most rudely.

"Heah, heah!" Amos protested burrowing farther into the straw mattress. "Go way and lemme finish my nap. I don't want no breakfus yet."

"Boy, ain't you hear dat bugle?"

"Sho' I ain't deef. Who dat fool blowing music dis ungawdly time o' night?"

"That's reveille."

"Well, please tell Mister Revel Lee to quit making dat racket. I ain't had my rest out yet."

"Oh, ain't you?"

"Boy, you heard me. Call me again in about five hours."

Before Amos knew what happened an irresistible force had snatched him violently from his cot and he was standing upright on the floor surrounded by blanket and mattresses. A brown-skinned non-com was making it profanely clear that the recruiting man had been guilty of further deceit. This was the regular getting-up time in the army.

Outside a drowsy and unhappy line formed in the sand under the scrub pines. They were being taught to count off. That was easy to Amos for he caught on to the idea that as soon as the man next you said something like, "Huh!" and jerked his head, you were expected to emit a similar bark and jerk your head too.

A red-faced second lieutenant introduced them to this simple army ritual and also gave them their first lessons in saluting. He ordered them "At Ease" and surveyed the line with discouragement. They were trying their best to look like soldiers, but they would have deceived nobody. Finally the officer's gaze focused on Amos more because of his size than anything else.

"What's your name?" he asked.

"Cap'n, sir, my name's Amos. Amos Crow. I'm fum Buford, Tennessee, and I——"

"All right. Can you read and write?"

"Cap'n, sir, I cain't say dat I can. I know some letters but look like no matter how hard I look at reading and writing I cain't make nothing out of it."

The officer's attention was attracted by a most unsoldierly signal.

Willie had his right hand in the air and was snapping his fingers as if he were in school.

"Well?" said the lieutenant, suppressing a grin with difficulty.

"Please, Cap'n. I can read and write. Fluent."

"Yeah," Amos volunteered for the benefit of the company, "but he ain't got no brains."

"Silence!" thundered the officer.

Amos wilted under the blast of the white man's displeasure, and Willie expanded correspondingly. Despite his short stature, Willie assumed an air of alertness and competency which did not fail to impress the despairing officer. On learning Willie's name the lieutenant said.

"Well, Crow, I'm going to give you a chance to see how much of a soldier you are. I'm going to appoint you temporary corporal. You will be in command of this squad."

"Hot damn!" Temporary Corporal Willie breathed under his breath and tossed a triumphant glance at Private Amos.

The officer heard the remark, but he had orders to go easy with the discipline until these boys got somewhat used to army restraint. He went on down the line bestowing the glories of temporary corporalhood on those who appeared to be most worthy. Having finished appointments for the company he gave 'em a short talk on the duties and responsibilities of this first promotion. From what he said Willie and the other fortunates became convinced that the whole army foundation rested on them and that if they displayed due diligence and loyalty they might all come out of the war with stars on their shoulders.

When they broke ranks the inflation of Temporary Corporal Willie Crow was visible to the naked eye. And it was more visible to the naked eye of Amos than to any one else.

"Boy," said Amos, "I can see your head swelling. Fust thing you know it's gonna bust and cover us all wid sawdust."

"Careful how you talk, Private," warned the haughty Willie, "I don't want you to think I got big head or anything like dat. But if you insults me I'll have to discipline you. You gotta respect your superiors, Private. Ain't you heard what de lootenant said?"

"Yeah, I heard all dat. But lemme tell you, Temporary. Army or no army, war or no war, I ain't gonna take no domination off you. If you try to ride me I'll show you how quick I can change a temporary corporal into a permanent corpse. You heard me."

And in spite of his new rank, Willie felt that he'd better go easy about imposing his will on this particular unit of his command.

CHAPTER XIV

Misery and Potatoes

Amos had never heard of General Sherman or his famous description of war. But when he first got into the service he would have said that hell was a poor second in general frightfulness. Every hope he had entertained that the army would make good the promises of the recruiter was shattered one by one. Life in the army was strange, set, irksome.

"Vittles" in the army was "chow" or rations. To acquire these important supplies you got in line with a sort of pie-pan and went down a row of boys standing on the other side of the kitchen window. As you passed each poured or slapped a disdainful dab of something into your pan.

Amos thought sadly as he surveyed his first issue of goldfish, of the dainties that used to find their way from Major Crawford Robinson's kitchen to his own supper table. In this moment of weakness, Camilla appeared as an almost pleasant retrospect.

And how they pestered you in this man's army! His place was at the bottom of all ranks. He came

to realize that from Temporary Corporal Willie right on up to President Wilson stretched a limitless line of officers—commissioned and non-coms—whose only worry seemed to be to keep him from rest.

"Aw, boy!" he protested, "dey don't only tell you what to do, but dey specify *how* to do it."

There were little red books—Willie had one of them—that devoted a page and a half to describing how a soldier must hold himself when he stood at attention. And take the one-time simple problem of turning round:

If a civilian were going one way and wanted to reverse his course he simply stopped, pointed his toes in the opposite direction and the thing was done. But in the army nothing was this simple.

"Watch me closely now," a long-suffering lieutenant said to Amos, "I place the toe of the right foot just behind the heel of the left foot. Thus, by pivoting on the right toe and the left heel you bring yourself to the about-face with both heels together and the toes pointing out at the required angle. See how it's done?"

"Yassir," lied Amos.

"All right now. Try it. About—*face!*"

Amos tried it. And ended with his nose in the

sand. At the end of ten minutes the lieutenant desisted. It began to look as if the recruit would break an ankle before he could master it.

"Dog-gone, boy," Temporary Willie said to him later, "don't look like you ever will learn soldiering. Don't you know de most important thing of all is learning to turn round?"

"Yeah? How come dat?"

"Well, now just supposin' you and me is at de front. We is off by ourselves skirmishing around and we goin' down a road. And here down de road comes a regiment of Germans, charging at us wid bayonets. Now, you either got to fight or retreat. And how you gonna retreat if you cain't learn to turn around properly?"

"Aw, boy, behave yourself. If I see a regiment of Germans charging down on me, you think I got to look in some book to see how to retreat?"

"Sho'. You gotta retreat 'cording to regulations."

"Listen, Temporary, you is a corporal and maybe you got to retreat 'cording to rules. But all I'd have to do would be to let my feet see dem Germans and my feet would know what to do. Dis*tinc*tively!"

Difficult as Amos was, the army did not despair. With infinite patience and tireless energy they

drilled him and thousands of others like him. The dust of their evolutions rose into the skies morning and afternoon. So far, they had not been issued rifles and they were drilled unarmed.

It was impressed on Amos with merciless monotony that to an infantryman, feet are of the utmost importance. You had to acquire uncanny control over them. His failure and the failures of divers comrades to gain this dominion threw the drills daily into snarls that would have baffled a puzzlemaker. At the order "Squads right" they dispersed in all directions. "Right oblique" was even worse. "At Ease" they performed middling well. The one command they could not have been criticized for was the order to "fall out."

Hikes weren't so much trouble to your head—but oh, man! what they did to your legs and feet. Amos went on one of three miles. When he got his shoes off his hot and palpitating socks, he observed to the pious Doremus:

"Boy, if dey'd walked me one block farther today dey'd had to call out de ambulance."

Doremus shook his head and sighed most sadly. "Brother," he observed, "what you took to-day wasn't nothing but a short stroll. And we didn't have no guns and packs. Wait'll you get a seventy-

pound bundle straddle of your back and a Springfield rifle riding your shoulder and have to do twenty miles in de hot sun. When you do dat, Brother, you gonna know you been somewhere."

Amos petted his leaping corns and made a silent prayer that such would never happen to him.

The army disregarded both prayers and feet. On a warm morning four days later came orders for another hike. Company B fell into something that resembled a column and slouched off through the dust that rose in the sunlight. Amos' spirit was willing but his feet were weak. Before they had covered two miles Temporary Willie was prodding his friend with harsh words.

At the end of five miles they made a stop for rest and Captain Dolan passed down the line to see how they were standing it. He was near Amos when the order came to fall in. Amos deserted the shade of a young pine with reluctance and resumed his limping progress through the sand. The captain noted his condition and called out:

"Think you can make it, boy?"

"Cap'n, sir, I'm doing my best. But my feet sho' is getting aggravated."

"Well, we don't want to cripple you. Fall out and return to camp."

Amos saluted and left the ranks. He waited in the shade until the tail of the column passed and until his feet subsided a bit. Then he hit the back trail. He was taking it easy and paying little attention to anything but his pains, when he turned a bend in the road and encountered a figure which brought him to rigid attention.

Approaching on a coal black thoroughbred was the lanky major with the blue eyes who had got him into the army. From his comfortable saddle the major looked down to see a dark and perspiring patriot who saluted with a fervor that made the horse shy. Examining the figure closely the major recognized Amos.

"Why, you're the flat-footed boy so fired with war spirit that you broke into the army."

"Yassir, Major. Dass me."

"And how are your feet holding out?"

"Look like dey plumb gone back on me, Major, sir. Sho' do. I was hikin' wid de others but I went so lame Cap'n told me I'd better go back and lay down a while."

Now, the major had been responsible for getting Amos into the army and his appearance was such as to arouse sympathy. He thought a minute and then said:

"I'll fix you up. What's your name and company?"

He wrote down the answer and something else on a paper which he handed Amos.

"Major, sir, what is dis writing on de paper?"

"It's an order that will favor your feet. It makes you a K. P."

"I'm already a Knight of Palmyra, uniform rank; wid sick and burying benefits partly paid up."

"This is something entirely different. It puts you on kitchen police. Present that to an officer or the mess sergeant and he'll take care of you."

"Thank you, Major, sir. Don't know nothing I'd like better dan being a police, and in de kitchen where all de rations is."

"Well,—hope you won't be disappointed." And with a mysterious grin, the major touched spurs to his black horse and was off down the sandy road.

Amos resumed his march with a heart so light that it helped to lift his feet. He found the mess sergeant and presented the writing the major had given him.

" 'At's fum a friend of mine, Big Boy," he remarked in a tone meant to sound careless.

The sergeant pretended to be vastly impressed. "Soldier," he said, "you must stand in with the

major. 'Tain't every new boy can drag down a good job like dissen."

"Well, quit gabbin' and lead me to it."

"Right this way, Lucky."

Amos' introduction to the company cook was performed with military brevity, and was accompanied by a wink from the sergeant. "Here's a new K. P., Gravey. Direct from the major. Think you can make room for him?"

"Well, we got a lot of applicants. But cose if dis here boy comes wid a order fum de major we got to let him in."

"All right," said Amos in something approaching the grand manner, "what do I do—if anything?"

"You don't do hardly nothing, soldier. Jest help me round here wid light easy jobs. Now in de fust place, does you know anything about how to peel potatoes?"

"Potatoes!" Amos repeated in shocked accents.

"Soldier, you heard me perfect. And you answers up loud and spry de way I likes. Here is de knife and over yonder is de potatoes. You take de knife in your right hand and a potato in your left. Den you proceed to remove de blouse from said vegetable."

It appeared as if every move Amos made was destined to end in disaster and potatoes. Black mutiny rose in his soul. But one look at the gorilla arms of the sergeant and the cleaver in the hand of the cook convinced him that he couldn't buck the system. Wondering what he had done to bring this sort of luck down on him he picked up the knife and attacked the hopeless mountain of spuds.

"Dog-gone," he muttered, "my luck has sho' gone sour. Look like ain't nothing in de world but misery and potatoes. How come is it dat things you want most is hard to get, and calamities like potatoes grow plentiful and promiscuous? Put a slice of potato in the ground and when you dig it up you got half a peck of 'em. But things you crave ain't growed like dat. You cain't plant a gin bottle and harvest no sprees. You cain't put a dime in the ground and dig up twenty-dollar bills. I wish Old Man Potato, or whoever 'twas invented dese vegetables, never had been borned. I wish——"

"Here, boy," the cook's threatening voice broke into the soliloquy, "quit dat mumbling to yourself and tell me what is dis here?" He waved in front of Amos a small pale pellet that might have been a prodigious pea that had lost its color.

"I dunno," said Amos, "you tell me what it is."

"Well, it was a full-grown spud when you started in on it. I been watching you chop off all de vegetable wid de skin. Boy, is you and me gonna tangle or is you gonna peel dem 'taters proper?"

After Gravey had gone back to the range, Amos shook his head despondently. "Look like dis here army got all de discomforts of home," he said. "Camilla wasn't no worse dan dis here cook man."

Some days later Amos was sitting outside the mess-kitchen door peeling as usual. A truck backed up and the driver either didn't see him or didn't care what happened to a mere K. P. He pulled a lever and the astonished Amos was caught in the load that was dumped out before he could escape. The avalanche came just as high as his neck. He found his head the apex of a peak made up of newly arrived potatoes.

The major, happening past at the moment, was astonished to observe a hand come up from the pyramid and touch the forehead protruding from the top.

"Major, sir," said Amos, "when we gonna have baked potatoes?"

CHAPTER XV

When I Write, I Flourish

It was a bitter cold night. The Y. M. C. A. hut was packed to suffocation. Complexions of the colored warriors present ranged all the way from blonds of a pale lemon shade to brunettes as dark as midnight in a "soft coal" shaft. A more or less decrepit piano was at the front of the room. Before a tiny platform a Y. worker barely had room to agitate the chipped ivories. Much jazz had been hammered out of the battered old box and it was astonished now to be caressed in a more tender tempo.

The Y. worker was bent on turning the minds of the dark soldiers from the coarsening influence of conflict to the gentler theme of home and mother. He played and sang of twittering birds. Of moonlit nights on the Mississippi, perfumed by roses and orange blossoms.

His efforts might have touched the toughened hearts of his hearers, but the suggestion of sweet scents had not the slightest effect upon the unmistakable aroma of the room. Pack two hundred

teeming colored boys in a room heated by an extremely eager cannon-ball stove and your nose is not going to be fooled by any concord of sweet sounds.

A row of kinky bullet heads bent over tables along the walls. Tongues protruded, clumsy fingers gripped worn-down pencils, shining black faces writhed in the agonies of composing letters to distant wives and sweethearts.

Temporary Corporal Willie sat at one of the writing desks and Private Amos stood over him preparing to dictate. Willie moistened the lead with his tongue and took a firmer grip on the pencil.

"Git going, boy," he urged.

"Dog-gone, Temporary, how do you start a letter?"

"Well, de proper and regular way would be to say 'Dear Camilla'!"

"Aw, boy! I can't write any sweet words like dat. She'll think I'm gone crazy and begin pestering me for money. Jest say, 'Camilla.' "

Willie wrote it down.

" 'Camilla,' " repeated Amos, searching the ceiling for words to express his thoughts, " 'I am well and doing well. I'm learning dis army work mighty fast and de general say to me de other day, "Amos

you is de best soldier I got. Don't go and get sick or anything cause I'm gonna need you bad when we run up against dem Germans." ' " Willie shook his head but put it down faithfully. " 'We got guns now wid baynits to go on de end of same. A baynit is a kinda butcher knife used for sticking and stabbing de enemy. We practise on hay Germans and play like we fighting wid each other. I done whup all de boys in the regiment at dis pastime.' "

"Aw, boy," protested Willie, looking up from the paper, "what I said you was, dat day in de bank, still holds good. Ain't you scared the devil'll get you for lying so strong?"

"If the devil's married he'll understand. You put it down like I say. 'And furthermore'—dat's to go in de letter—'and furthermore I done broke all de records at shooting practise. Handling a gun comes nacheral wid me and dey done called off shooting for a week cause dey got to put new bull's eyes in de targets which I done plug 'em all out of.

" 'I been 'quiring round 'mongst de soldiers if anybody's met up wid dis friend of yours, Henry Skip. I found a man say he know him. He say dis Henry's a striker which means a dog robber, and a dog robber is de lowest thing in de world. A dog robber is ten feet lower dan a worm's bosom.

But we all make mistakes and I ain't hold no hard feelings against you 'cause I may be starting for France most any time and I'll be fighting and bleedin' for de Democrats.' "

"Dat's all de fabrikating you gonna do?"

"Naw, Temporary, here's some more to put down: 'Tell Miss Mary Jane next time you see her in de kitchen, I done been trying to do what she told me down by the deepo. I ask everybody 'bout she know who—but ain't nobody seen him or hearn tell of him. I'm still keeping she know what and if ever I run acrost him I will deliver same into his hand.' "

"Is you finish?"

"Naw. Spit on de pencil and keep going, Temporary. Now say: 'If any of dem black slackers in Henpeck get scared and worried for fear of the Germans, tell 'em all Amos Crow, Private, U. S. A., stands in de path and dey ain't no danger till I been crushed and defeated. Send me whatever you can especially money and tobacco—eatin', burnin' or cigarettes. Take good care of Bingo. If he is pore and bony when I git back I'll learn you what it means to be married to a hero. Dass 'bout all, Amos.' "

"Want me to sign your name?"

"Aw, man, is you trying to aggravate me? Gimme dat pencil and stand away. I makes my own X. And any time I write, I flourish."

Some weeks later a sorrel-colored orderly brought a white man around to see Amos. He was a broad white man in civilian clothes. A black slouch hat was pulled down over his eyes and a black overcoat collar was pulled up over his face. Both hands were buried deep in his pockets. When they were alone in the barracks room the uneasy Amos admitted his identity.

"Who is you, white man?" he demanded.

The answer was another question. "Know what that is?" The man had pulled one hand from his pocket and in the palm displayed a small silver shield.

"Yassir, Boss. I seen dem before. You is de law."

"Well, that's one way of putting it. I'm a detective."

"Cap'n, I ain't steal nothing."

"No? Well, at least you were involved in the theft of ten thousand dollars down at Buford, Tennessee. I'm in the employ of an insurance company. We had to pay the loss of that money 'cause

the bank was insured. But we ain't gonna let no crook get away with it. Get me?"

"Boss, I got you."

"I want to know all about what happened. Give me the details of that robbery."

Any one who has tried to get evidence out of a colored man when he doesn't want to give it, knows that he can't be forced. Amos had to protect a friend in this case. He closed up like a frozen clam. He couldn't remember a thing.

The detective got hot. He swore he would throw Amos in jail and keep him there. Amos retorted that jail was peace and freedom compared to army life. The white man raged and threatened physical violence.

"Boss," Amos retorted, "you can kill me, but you cain't eat me."

At last the law took a more kindly tack. He unveiled a fairly fat roll and allowed Amos to eye the frog-skins. Then in a wheedling voice he said:

"I'll pay you to tell me what you know. I'll make it worth your while. I'll give you five dollars."

Amos shook his head violently, but his eye was on the greenbacks.

"Ten."

Amos wagged another negative, but not so emphatically.

"Twenty."

His head didn't move, but Amos managed to say, "Nossir."

"Twenty-five. And that's absolutely as high as I'll go." He made a motion toward his pocket with the money.

"All right, Boss," Amos gave in hastily, "ease me de twenty-five. And I'll tell you everything I know."

"Now you're getting some sense." The man counted out five five-dollar bills and laid them in the itching brown palm of our hero. Amos deposited the treasure inside his blouse and began:

"Boss, I was totin' dat money from de 'spress-office for de Major. We got into a shadder an' something hit me on de haid feel like a ton of brick. I passed out cold. When I woke up the money was gone. And dass all I know 'bout it."

Rage and threaten as he would, the betrayed detective could wring no more information out of his subject.

CHAPTER XVI

Steve to the Front

After enlisting as Charles Miller, Steve Rhinehart was assigned to Jefferson Barracks, St. Louis. Here cursing regular army men sought to make soldiers in two months when all the world knows that it requires at least six. The situation had one advantage for the newest recruit.

Rhinehart's father had been a firm believer in the old adage that a boy ought to be taught discipline. With that in mind he had sent his young son to a military school. After a year and a half, financial disaster and his father's death forced the boy out of the academy. But he never forgot the fundamental drills and exercises that were hammered into his young and protesting consciousness.

The soldiering came back to him rapidly on the dusty parade grounds when red and perspiring drill masters bellowed and begged for "Squads right," and "Left front into line." It felt natural for Rhinehart once more to lie full length on his belly with an army rifle snugged against his shoul-

der and try for a dancing bull's eye two hundred yards distant. Furthermore his heart was still sore with injustice and protest. To forget his misfortunes he threw himself into the vast intricacies of military science with savage ardor.

And it was not long before he began to stand out against the background of palpable ignorance and ineptness. While the company stood at ease one day the captain spoke in an undertone to a discouraged top-sergeant.

"How are they coming along, Sergeant."

"Terrible, sir. But we'll make soldiers out of 'em. We got to."

"Been keeping an eye on that youngster?" He indicated Steve.

"Yes, sir. He's my pride and hope. Looks like he's the only one in the lot that knows his left foot from his right. A good kid and a clean one too."

The captain did not forget. In six weeks Rhinehart sewed on his sleeves the three stripes that made him a sergeant.

The promotion lost much of its savor because there was no one he could tell about it. He had held firmly to his conviction that his best plan was completely to submerge himself into his new name and his new calling. A dozen times he had written Mary Jane and a dozen times his common sense

told him that they were still looking for him to answer a charge of robbery and that a letter could be traced.

When he got his three stripes he felt as if he just had to write. In a secluded corner of the Y. hut, he poured out his heart into a long letter. It was sealed and addressed to Mary Jane. But before he mailed it he went into the company offices. While running through a file of mimeographed red tape he encountered a sheet that made him jump. It was a circular put out by a detective agency, and it bore his own picture and name. The text set forth that a five-hundred-dollar reward would be paid for information leading to the arrest of this man who was wanted in connection with a ten-thousand-dollar robbery at Buford, Tennessee.

Rhinehart waited until he was alone in the room. Then he tore the circular from the file.

"Not much chance being recognized in uniform with an army haircut," he counseled with himself, "but there is a chance just the same. I'll remove temptation from the paths of my buddies."

The circular was ripped into bits and consigned to a waste can. It was followed by the letter he had written to Mary Jane. He was innocent, but innocent men are arrested and put in jail every day.

War heightens all the emotions and desires. It

is bad enough to be hopelessly in love under normal conditions. Many factors joined now to sharpen Rhinehart's misery. He was separated from the girl he loved; he had never heard from her since he left; he was in the army and headed for the most deadly war the world had ever seen, and it was entirely within the possibilities that he would be crushed into the soil of France and never see her again.

These thoughts beat constantly on his brain when he lay on his bunk after taps. All his strength was not sufficient to drag his mind away from them. The two personalities within him carried on a regular dialogue—a dialogue that sounded so loud to him he wondered why the sleeping soldiers could not hear it:

"She loves you. There was no doubt of that in the way she kissed you."

"Yes," answered the opposing voice, "but women change. And you left a dangerous rival with her."

"Davis? He is too old."

"Don't deceive yourself. Young girls are flattered by the attentions and the sophistication of older men. She will go to him."

"She will not."

"She will."

"Then let her. If she is that kind, I do not want her."

Final as this sounded, it never ended his inner turmoil. He did want her, more than anything else in the world, and no amount of denial was of any comfort.

Outwardly Rhinehart gave no indication of his unrest. He grew harder, browner, more sure of himself and of the things he was learning. If the fuming generals in France could have seen him and the thousands like him, they might have been more hopeful of that army which was growing up by compound multiplication in camps that had sprung up miraculously throughout the United States.

And there was plenty of fuming in France. On a certain afternoon a fat old brigadier of the Signal Corps raged up and down a mirrored and brocaded room at G. H. Q. in Chaumont. His color indicated that he was in a dangerous state of blood-pressure. A thin and discreet aide-de-camp reflected his moods and sought to soothe him.

"A hell of an army!" exclaimed the furious brigadier. "Haven't got anything in it but farmers and ribbon clerks! Where in hell are the craftsmen and mechanics?"

"The shipyards——" suggested the suave aide.

"That's right. They're in the shipyards. Drawing down twenty dollars a day. And the ships will fall to pieces when the first wave hits 'em. I've got to have telephone men, telegraph men, wireless men, men who know something about electricity."

"The A. E. F. needs 'em all right."

"A. E. F. hell! I need 'em. I've got to get 'em. If I don't they are going to break me and shoot me back home."

"If it's as serious as that," said the aide, getting up and reaching for a cable blank, "we'd better start burning the wires."

"Make it hot. What'll we say now?"

What they said must have been effective. Word flashed to all the camps to pick out men qualified to serve the wires and communications. The same day Rhinehart's captain called him into the office.

The captain sat with his lean booted legs crossed. He was studying Rhinehart's service record. He looked over the trim boy standing at attention.

"Sergeant," he began, "you've got a pretty good record here?"

Rhinehart said, "Yes, sir," and waited.

"This card says you know something about telegraphy and telephones?"

"Well, sir, I know all about telegraphy; and telephones are a good deal the same. I could handle a phone line all right."

The gratified captain noted that he did not say, "I think I can," or "I'd like to try." This boy knew. The officer tapped the card and looked out over the parade ground for a moment.

"Well, Sergeant, they need you on the other side. We've got requisitions here for men with your qualifications. They're wanted in the Signal Corps—for work along the lines of communication. Would you like to go?"

"Yes, sir."

The captain liked this brief and sufficient affirmative.

"I see by your card that you speak German?"

"Yes, sir. My mother and father were German."

"And that's nothing to apologize for either. Well, German will be of use to the army over there. You've got the stuff. Watch your step and there is promotion ahead of you. I warn you, though, that this man's army belongs to you sergeants. There are a hundred little privileges and profits. Being neither a private nor an officer has its advantages. You can play 'em both for all they're worth. It's no picnic holding a commission. Your pay really

wouldn't amount to as much as you get now with free clothes and chow. Commissions bring worry and responsibility. In view of those facts, would you like to be an officer?"

"Yes, sir. I would."

"Good. I don't want you to think I'm offering you the promotion. But I'm going to give you an edge by shooting you to France with the first lot of these signal men. I can do that much. The rest depends on yourself."

"Thank you, sir."

And though it was not strictly according to regulations, the captain rose and they shook hands.

CHAPTER XVII

An Eighter from Decatur

Warmer weather was coming and the camp which struggled with the military education of Amos and Willie stirred to more violent activity. It was a recognized fact that the Germans were waiting for the approach of spring to make a supreme effort to crush the Allies before Americans could reach the battle-fields in any numbers. There was much talk and speculation as to when the Third Battalion of Pioneers would be called to the sea.

There came a time when it was strangely easy to get passes from camp. The old supply sergeant twisted his white mustache and spoke from the profundity of his army experience.

"Colonel's letting up on you right now. After a little while he'll tighten so hard you can't get through the gate riding a elephant and carrying a pussonel pass from Black Jack Pershing. And that'll mean salt water for us. Better go while the goin's good."

Instead of conferring his money on Willie or

some other dice master, Amos had secluded most of the twenty-five dollars which he had extracted from the law man. He took his chance and got a pass. Willie managed to extract one at the same time.

Outside the gates a parasitical settlement had fastened itself on the great camp. There were hundreds of shacks selling all sorts of necessities and various brands of forbidden luxuries. Since the soldiers had very little money, the patriotic shopkeepers contrived to even things by charging double prices. As the Crows approached this center of brigandage Willie stopped.

"Well, boy," he said. "I'll be leaving you now."

"Aw, Temporory——"

"Sorry, Private, but I got to. Couple of high-class Jersey blackbirds done fall in love with me. And I'll have to travel fast to see 'em both before time comes to report back."

"Well, I ain't got smallpox. Take me along and interduce me to one of 'em."

"You don't seem to understand. Neither of these gals would have anything to do with a soldier ranking under a corporal. 'Sides you cain't expect me to go round inflaming gals for your benefit."

The despondent Amos stood on the curb and saw his friend swing into a passing jitney.

Left to his own devices, his feet turned without instruction toward the At Ease Lunchroom. The At Ease did a thriving business in hot dogs and cold drinks. Its pool and billiard tables were usually in great demand. But in a rear compartment was the proprietor's gold mine. It consisted of a windowless room where a shifty-eyed assistant bootlegged gin and rye for the thirsty throats of soldiers. It was a dangerous business but extremely profitable. To this forbidden chamber Amos directed his feet when Willie forsook him.

First he downed three jolts of blistering gin. Not until he had added an equal number of straight ryes did his stomach really begin to sing. In this favorable state he was accosted when he emerged for air. His accoster was a dark youth whose retreating face was punctuated with pimples. He had on a shiny gray suit the pants of which belled widely at the bottom.

"Soldier," the young man said, "how'd you like to get out of the army?"

"Who's asking me?"

"I'm asking you. I got it straight. This camp's headed for where the bullets fly."

"Le'm fly! I'm a hard man from Tennessee. Bullets bounce off my hide, dey do."

"Just the same I've got something here that you might want to use some time. Take a look," and he displayed a piece of paper.

At the top of the paper was a most official-looking eagle with stars twinkling overhead, and a sheaf of arrows grasped in its claws. There was some reading below.

"I see de old Uncle Sam chicken at the top," Amos observed, "but I ain't never learned my letters. What kind of paper is it?"

"Boy," the pimply youth tapped the slip impressively, "this here is a discharge from the army. It's the best kind of discharge there is. See?—It's marked immediate and urgent. Any time you want freedom all you got to do is flash this on a sentry."

"White boy, you foolin'. As you were!"

"Fooling! I'll show you. Here,"—he called to another youth who happened by,—"what's this I got in my hand."

The second young man read the paper and looked up. "Why, it's an army discharge."

"And what's this name signed at the bottom?"

A low whistle came from the other's lips and he said in an awed voice. "Why, it's President Wilson's signature. There it is—Woodrow Wilson." He whistled again and slipped into the blind tiger.

"Ain't I told you?" demanded he of the pimples. "That'll get you out of the army at any time, and it's for sale, boy. There she is. A sure cure for cold feet."

"Who's got cold feet?" demanded the indignant and half-plastered Amos. "Boy, I tell you I crave carnage, I do. I'm a bearcat from the bottoms and I'm hungry for fresh meat. When I land on dem Germans dey gonna think it's de end of de world."

At this time the pimpled one pulled a sad face, and Amos expected him to burst out crying. In a shaken voice he said, "Well, I thought maybe you'd help a guy out. You looked like a colored gentleman with a heart. That was why I asked you. I need this discharge myself because I have a wife and seven children to support. They're half starving and I can't get no work to do. So I got to sell it to buy some groceries. I don't know what'll become of all them kiddies if I don't sell it to some one."

"Aw, white boy, dat's too bad," Amos' sympathetic nature was further gentled by the alcohol. "I don't care 'bout breaking out of the army now. But maybe some time I'll get tired of it and want to kick free. How much you say that paper cost?"

"I wouldn't do it for any one else, but I'll let you have the discharge for thirty dollars."

"Ain't got dat much jack."

After much haggling the alleged discharge changed hands for seventeen dollars and fifty cents. The rest of Amos' day was spent around the pool tables. All he could do was watch the games. He had invested his last dime in the white boy's paper.

The veteran sergeant was right. After a period of easy passes followed one when there were no passes at all. But the confinement was lightened by a pay-day. The weather had turned spring-like and it allowed the soldiers to play their favorite pastime outdoors. The pine woods were dotted with kneeling circles of warriors. Greenbacks and silver circulated freely. The hub of each ring was a pair of cavorting dominoes. From the gatherings rose the exultations of the fortunate and the despairing groans of the unlucky.

"Four and four. Dass my point. I'm an eighter from Decatur."

"Bam! An eight it is. I leave it lay. Fade me, babies—fade me. Bam! And a seven."

"Two dollars says he don't."

"I got half o' that."

"Listen, dice. It's papa talking."

"I'm cleaned!"

The last sad confession came from Amos. When he bent his knees he had thirty dollars in full payment for a month of soldiering; when he straightened up twenty minutes later the thirty dollars had evaporated. The lure of craps lies in swift action. If the spotted cubes are smiling, the company's payroll may nestle in your O. D. pants before the day is done. If luck scowls, the agony of losing doesn't last long.

As Amos turned away from his disaster, he noted that Willie was kneeling in an accumulation of greenbacks that made a deep nest about him. And Amos voiced an unworthy thought.

"Either old Temporary is crazy wid luck or dem dice of his'n is crazy wid discipline. I wonder is dey loaded?"

CHAPTER XVIII

A Discharge Is Discharged

There came a series of rigid inspections followed by orders that meant "get ready to move."

"Where you guess we moving to?" Corporal Willie Crow asked his friend and subordinate.

"Where you think?" Amos retorted. "We're headed for France. Ain't dat de place de fighting is? Dey ain't been learning us to shoot wid guns and stick with bayonets for no pleasure excursion."

He paused to take a good look at his superior. "Willie," he said, "how come you sweating like dat on de haid? Don't you feel good?"

"Boy, I don't. I feel miserable. Seem like my stomach is upset. I must have swallowed a fly."

"Naw, Temporary, dat ain't it. I know what's wrong wid you. You scared stiff now dat we going to de boats."

"Amos, you my friend, ain't you?"

"Sho'."

"Well, I don't mind telling you dat I don't want to cross no ocean and get shot at by no Germans.

I got all de money my pockets'll hold and down in town I got two of the purtiest little chocolate drops you ever slapped your eyes on. I'm doing all right here. I'm satisfied. Don't make so much diffunce wid you. You ain't got no woman 'cept your wife and you never'll have no money. Dog-gone, I'd give anything to bust out of dis army. Anything!"

"Why don't you desert?"

"And get shot in de pants by a sentry?"

"You sho' is rarin' to go."

"Boy, I'm telling you. I'd give anything to get loose."

"Well, Willie, I'm a friend of yours and I'd like to help you. You got a roll. Specify how much it would be worth to get you out of de army."

"Amos," groaned Willie, "don't joke at me. You know this here's no joking matter."

"Am I laughing? I ask you a simple question—how much would you pay in cash to get loose? 'Cause if you really want your freedom, an' if you have de cash, you're half-way home now."

"How?" Willie was hopeful but still skeptical.

"Wid dis." And Amos displayed before the bulging eyes of the corporal the "urgent discharge" he had bought a few days before from the pimpled youth.

Willie examined the document thoroughly. He surveyed the eagle; he looked with awe upon the mighty signature that illuminated the lower right-hand corner. "Amos," he whispered, "where at did you get this?"

"Never mine where at I got it. Fack is I ain't needin' it and to 'commodate a friend I'll throw it on de market. How bad do you want it, Willie? Put a value on your yearning, boy. Specify."

"Fifty dollars," Willie began.

The bid mounted rapidly until it reached one hundred dollars and from there on, with increasing slowness until it came to a final stop at two hundred and fifty dollars.

"That's my limit, boy," Willie said with convincing finality. "I ain't got no more'n dat."

"Gimme the money and de discharge is yours."

So slowly and painfully that you would have thought each bill a part of his heart, Willie counted out the price. Amos verified it twice and tucked it carefully in the innermost recesses of his blouse before he surrendered the coveted paper.

Now that he had it, Willie suffered a nobler pain than that of parting with the bills.

"Amos," said he, "I sho' hate to go 'way and leave you here. You going to war all alone. Me

and you's been together since a long time. I may never see you again."

"Aw, don't put it so scary, Willie."

"Well, I hope for de best. Send me some picture post-cards when you git across."

"I'll do it if I can get one of the boys to write down your name. How you gonna work dat discharge, Willie? Gonna tell Cap'n Dolan you leaving?"

"Naw. Wid a high-up discharge like dis'n all you got to do is walk out de gate. Well, good-by, Amos. If you get killed, die like a hero."

"G-good-by, Willie." They shook hands and parted hastily to escape embarrassing emotions which they felt rising in their bosoms.

They were to meet again very soon. It was in a closed office with armed guards at the door. About a long table was seated an awesome array of white officers. The occasion was a court martial and the cause for the proceedings was Corporal Willie Crow of Company B, Third Pioneer Battalion.

The corporal made a dejected figure as he stood beside an alert guard in one corner of the room. His head was bandaged, the wrapping coming down over one of his eyes. The other eye was fixed with deadly intentness upon the face of Private Amos

Crow who did not attempt to meet the gaze. Books were consulted, the charge was read and the questioning began.

The first witness was the sentry who had made the capture. He was a bandy-legged little colored boy with a squeaky voice and he identified himself as Private Hentooth Taylor, of a certain infantry outfit. They got all the preliminary facts straight—that he was on guard at the West Gate on a certain hour of a certain night. The prosecuting officer instructed him to relate exactly what happened on that night.

A. Well, sir, I was walking back and forth front of de gate like it say in regulations. I hears footsteps and down de road dis here boy comes sashaying.

Q. Which boy?

A. Dat'n over yander wid de wrapping 'round his haid.

Q. Corporal Willie Crow, the accused?

A. Yassir. He comes sashaying down de road like he was a general or something. I takes up my position directly in front of dis advancing boy and tells him to halt. He come right on wid his haid in de air like he gonna walk right over me. I say "Halt" again. And dis time he halt cause iffen he

hadn't he'd found my baynit in amongst his rations. Next I ax him where at he paradin' dis time of night. He say, "I'm gwine home." I say, "Oh, is you?" He say, "I'll say I is." Den he hands me a slip of paper wid writin' on it.

Q. Is this the paper he handed you?

A. (Examining the paper.) Yassir, dat's hit. (Paper passed around and gravely examined by each of the officers.) He hand me dat paper and say I can't stop him 'cause he got his discharge.

Q. And you knew the discharge was fake?

A. Didn't know what it was, but corporal of the guard tell me not to let nobody out. So I tell dis here boy to take back his paper and to de rear march.

Q. Yes—and what did he do then?

A. He jump through de little gate and start ofl down de road like de devil was after him. My legs is bent so I ain't no good runnin' but I know I can ketch him wid a bullet. I pull down on him wid de old rifle and knick him side of de haid. Wid dat he stop runnin'. He retreats back to me and surrenders unconditional.

These facts were duly corroborated by the corporal of the guard. The prisoner was then put on the stand. Denying any desire to desert, the ac-

cused described buying the discharge off a comrade in arms. Of course he thought it was good and official. Wasn't President Wilson's name signed on it in ink? Also didn't he pay two hundred and fifty dollars for said fraudulent discharge? He had bought the paper off Private Amos Crow of his own squad. Private Crow was in the room now. The accused pointed him out where he stood, boring him with a bitter glance from his single visible eye.

Private Amos Crow on the stand. Yassir, he knew the accused. He and the accused came from the same town. They had been friends for many years. That was all Amos seemed to know. He fell back behind an impregnable defense of pretended stupidity and emphatic denial.

Q. I will show the witness a paper which purports to be a discharge from the United States Army and bears the forged signature of the President of the United States. I will ask the witness if he sold this paper to Corporal Willie Crow?

A. Nossir, Cap'n. I never sold him no paper.

Q. The accused will control himself and keep quiet. You say, Private, that you did not sell this paper to the accused. Did you ever see the paper before?

A. Nossir, Cap'n, I never laid eyes on it before.

At this juncture of the proceedings the guard saved Willie from exploding by giving him a glass of water.

Embarkation was imminent. The officers were busy. They did not take long to frame a verdict. They leaned toward mercy because they were sure the prisoner really believed he had a discharge; that he was the innocent victim of fraud and had had no intention to desert. But the crime could not be overlooked. Willie was reduced to the grade of private and fined three months' pay. These penalties, added to the fact that he had invested two hundred and fifty dollars in the troublesome paper, and had been nicked on the head by a service bullet were deemed sufficient deterrents for any repetition.

The next meeting of the Two Black Crows was painful to both. You can't long avoid a person when you sleep in the same barracks, and Willie finally got Amos cornered.

"Dog-gone, boy," he began bitterly, "if it had been anybody but you I would have dulled my razor on him soon as dey let me out of de guardhouse."

"Calm yourself, Willie. Did I know dey was poison in dat paper, I sho' wouldn't have done

you like dat. I bought dat discharge off a white boy for a certain amount; I bought it in good faith. Den I sold it to you for a certain amount; and I sold it in good faith. Paper wasn't no good. Well—ain't I sorry?"

"Then gimme back my two hundred and fifty dollars."

"I ain't dat sorry."

"Boy, dat makes you just as bad and just as mean as a hold-up man. It's wicked as highway robbery, that's what it is!"

"Yeah? And how did you 'cumulate all dat money? You done it wid a pair of dice dat blush every time an honest man look 'em in de eye. I speck dey taken dis much money off me since I first begin shootin' wid you. We'll just consider dat two hundred and fifty dollars as a collection of debt, and call it square."

CHAPTER XIX

Thirteen Black Cats

The U. S. Transport *Triton* wallowed heavily on her way through the long blue swells of the mid-Atlantic. War-paint gave her the look of a seagoing zebra. Her vast belly was crammed with stores. Her decks swarmed with black soldiers in olive drab. Built to carry two thousand five hundred men, she was proving now that four thousand could be jammed aboard.

On the battle-fields toward which her bow was pointed the Germans had begun their long-expected drive. You couldn't blame the American and Allied commanders if they failed to concern themselves with the fact that in the overcrowded quarters Private Doremus Upshaw invisibly blacked the eye of an inky soldier two bunks away when he stretched himself that morning.

The sandy-haired Doremus had been converted by vivid pictures of fire and brimstone at a wild revival the previous summer. He had resisted all the temptations of camp-life and now that they

were at sea he became more devout than ever. Sitting under the projection of a life-boat, he looked across the troubled face of the waters and chanted a comforting bar from a familiar hymn:

"Old Jordan stream is deep and broad,
I'm on de bank. Oh, Lawd, Oh, Lawd!
Come carry me a-cross!"

The supplication had a peculiar and particular application to the voyagers on the *Triton.* It looked as if the ship was hoodooed from the time she cast loose her hawsers at the Hoboken dock.

Before the tightly-packed soldiers on her decks had lost sight of the Statue of Liberty, there had been a sudden jar and the ship stopped. Some of them expected to be torpedoed before they left land. A mild panic was scotched by the white officers who passed down the decks assuring everybody that the boat was still in New York harbor and that she had merely run aground. High tide assisted by ten panting tugs got her loose, and the voyage to France was continued.

Two days out the convoy ran smack into a sudden hurricane. The thick weather and violent winds scattered the ships and the nervous colored

souls on the *Triton's* decks lost sight of all the sister transports. The chow lines that midday were short and docile. Heavy seas had taken the appetites of the absentees. It seemed to the suffering warriors that it also took all their rations of the past week.

Willie had remained on deck and therefore was in better shape than his buddy who had retired to his bunk with a stomach that was doing wild acrobatics. After a few hours the weather cleared and the eager eyes of Willie were able to make out another ship on the starboard quarter. It was a cheering sight and he hurried to announce it to the agonized Amos.

As Willie edged his way between the groaning bunks the ship gave a lurch and a dull roar announced that another Atlantic mountain had tried to join them on board.

"Oh, man!" groaned Amos. "Listen to dem waves mashing up against de ship."

"Come up on de roof, Amos," cried Willie. "Come on. I got something to show you."

"W-whut is it?"

"It's a ship."

"A ship! Boy, call me when you see a tree." The suffering soldier turned his face the other way.

The following day was bright with only a mod-

erate swell. But to the inexperienced voyagers the seas still looked like green mountains. They strengthened a growing conviction that there was a curse on the ship and that the journey was sure to end disastrously.

Willie and Amos were wedged into a sheltered corner of the sun deck discussing the evil manifestations and wondering what had caused them. Suddenly Amos looked up and his eyes froze in their sockets. Willie followed his friend's gaze and a chill ran down to his very toes.

There, sitting on the deck as if she owned it, was a skinny black cat. She examined the frightened soldiers with a disdainful glitter in her green eyes, washed her face calmly and started away waving a sinuous tail in the air. Amos started after her on hands and knees.

"Hey, soldier!" rasped a voice, "you must love trouble."

Amos looked around to discover a pair of hairy red legs which supported an extremely large blue sailor. He abandoned his all-fours position.

"Naw, Mister Sailor, I'm a lover of peace."

"Then leave that cat alone, see."

"But, man! Black cats is outrageous luck, dey is. Cain't we give this one to the fish?"

"If you did you'd go overboard yourself, see. That cat's the skipper's pet, see. If anything happened to her the old man would make it so hot on board wouldn't nobody be able to stand it. But she's a good cat, is Minnie. Us sailors didn't like her at first 'count of that superstition. We've changed our minds though. We been through the sub zone a dozen times and nothing never hit us. Now we're all crazy about that cat. She's as smart as a human and the best little mother in the world."

"Mother?"

"Sure. Come 'ere and I'll show you."

The awed black soldiers followed their blue guide into a dark storeroom. He pointed to a corner. At first their eyes could see nothing but a constellation of specks that looked like green fire. But an unmistakable "mew" enlightened them. As their eyes grew accustomed to the darkness they made out a soap-box filled with kittens.

"The finest little cats you ever see." The sailor couldn't have been prouder if they had been his own children.

"Is dey black too?"

"Not a white spot on any of 'em. You ought to see 'em play."

"Yeah? H-how many of 'em is dey?"

"Well, Minnie never does things by halves. Whether it's rat ketching or kitten having. There's a record litter. A full dozen of 'em."

"Twelve kittens and de mammy. How many do dat make in all?"

"That's thirteen."

Amos groaned. "I was hoping my arithmetic was wrong, Mister. Thirteen black cats! And here us is out in de middle of the ocean wid Germans prowling for us!"

The Two Black Crows helped each other out into the sunlight. If they had known in the first place that the crew included one black cat—let alone the fatal muster of thirteen—log-chains couldn't have pulled them on board.

"Boy, that sho' is bad," breathed Willie.

"Bad! If I had hip boots I'd get right off the boat an' see could I wade home."

The fearsome facts ran through the crowded decks with a speed that only bad news employs. Thirteen black cats on the ship, and the means of counteracting their dire influence extremely limited. You can not pick up horseshoes in the mid-Atlantic. And there are no pastures in which to hunt four-leaf clovers.

A sudden and feverish market for luck-pieces

developed. A buckeye, thoroughly seasoned in the pocket and picked in the dark of the moon changed hands for fifteen dollars. A rabbit-foot whose owner swore he had taken it from a graveyard cottontail went into a dice game at a valuation of thirty-six dollars and fifty cents. Its new proprietor did a thriving business renting it out to dicemen whose luck succumbed to the evil influences abroad on the decks.

Amos was one of his clients. His last four bits went to lease the luck-piece. It was held in the grasp of his big black fist which weighted down a small stack of bills on the sanded teak deck. Willie had charge of the bouncing bones. He rubbed the disciplined cubes between skilled palms and rolled them out.

"E—leven! Sons of misfortune, read 'em and weep!"

"Cleaned again," Amos announced as he got up off his haunches. "An' three weeks to pay-day."

Willie was tucking more money under his knees. "Let it be a lesson to you, Amos," he observed meaningly. "Money you get dishonest never does you no good."

Amos knew that he referred to the two hundred and fifty dollars which he had paid for the disas-

trous discharge back in camp. All this amount, except small change Amos had invested in cigarettes and drink, had gravitated back to Willie, and the other skilled manipulators. Amos wondered as he joined the sad fraternity who could only watch the shots whether there was such a thing as justice in the world.

Each routine mishap on board the *Triton* was taken by the colored soldiers as further proof that misfortune voyaged with them. This conviction only increased the gambling fever. Every corner held its intent circle of dice flingers. The national pastime of the army kept minds off real troubles. Also each soldier hoped that the bad luck on board had fastened itself on his opponents in the crap games.

Two things could interrupt the gamesters. One was the appearance of a white officer. The other was the devout Doremus. The shadow of this mottled-faced zealot from Alabama was enough to blight the noisiest group. One day after he had passed with disapproving look at their sinful game, Willie said under his breath to Amos:

"Something sho' has put de jody on dis heah old skiff. It must be dem black cats. Den again——"

"It must be dat Doremus—huh?"

"S-hh!"

"No use shushing. Everybody knows de unluckiest thing in de wide world is a red-headed cullud boy."

CHAPTER XX

Old General Averages

The piety of Doremus increased as the ship got nearer the submarine zone. With the permission of the officers he held revivals in a mess hall. He exhorted the erring brothers. He led them in chanting the old camp-meeting hymns. Fear of the undersea threat counteracted the prejudice against his reddish hair. Further additions to his flock came from the crap shooters whose pockets were vacant. It was for this last reason that Amos attended his revival one night.

Doremus exhorted the sinners in the chanting singsong of the sawdust preacher.

"Oh, Brothers, heah we is on a steamboat out on dis mighty river. She's ten thousand miles wide and a thousand miles deep. Oh, Brothers, git right wid your souls! I say git right! 'Tain't no time for cussing and crap shooting——"

"Amen!" wailed a penniless dice victim.

"—and crap shooting. Dangers is swarming round us. Oh, Brothers, dey's danger in de air and

danger underneaf. In de waters below dem Huns is slipping along seeking for to stab us wid torpedoes. De Good Book tells all about de sea and de dangers thereof. Now who was it—I say who was it in de Good Book had a disastrous time on de waters?"

"Brother Noah," shouted Amos.

"Aw, naw! I don't mean him. I mean Ole Man Jonah. Jonah disobeyed de command. He went A. W. O. L. Ole Jonah was told to hike one place. But he see a boat hitched to de shore and he decides he'd rather go for a boat excursion. He got on de ole boat and out in de middle of de ocean—jest 'bout where we is at now—right here, Brothers, a big storm come up! The winds blowed and the waters rose high. Sailors try to figger what caused bad luck.

"And what was de cause of de bad luck? I say what was de cause? Why, de sailors figgered Old Jonah himself was de cause. So dey grabbed him one night and chucked him overboard. And after dat everything was all right. The waters went down, de sea was ca'm and peaceful and de sailors didn't have no more bad luck."

"Sho' 'nuff?"

"Ain't I tellin' you, Brothers? When dey got

rid of de man dat caused all de bad luck, ole ship sail along easy and peaceful. And how come was it Jonah had all dis misfortune in him? It was because his discipline wasn't good. He disobeyed orders. He went on de boat excursion when he hadn't oughter. And he played craps wid de sailors. Dat's why he had all de bad luck. Dat was de cause of it."

"Git hot, Doremus," shouted a listener.

"Now, sposin' something was to happen to us right now. Here we is out in de middle just 'bout where Jonah had his bad luck. What would you do, Brothers,—I say what would you do right now if trouble was to appear?"

The sermon ceased suddenly. With tense black faces the khaki-clad congregation strained forward. Something had happened. The steady pounding of engines had stopped, and the *Triton* was rising and falling straight up and down. All eyes were fixed on the reddish hair of Doremus, and all minds wondered what new misfortune had befallen the ship. Amos spoke up at last:

"Doremus, you called it. Ole boat sho' has stopped."

The meeting broke up immediately. Eager questions were answered by a cool black top-sergeant.

"Keep your shirts on, you boys. Nothing's happened 'cept one of de ship steam-engine's broke down. Dey're fixing it now. No. Ain't any danger. We ain't in de sub zone yet."

"Yeah?" Amos retorted. "How 'bout dat sub boat went all de way cross de ocean?"

"Pipe down, soldier. It's like I'm telling you. See dem lights over dere." He pointed to where distant pin-points of light were winking some signal. "Dat's a destroyer. She looking out for us."

"We sho' would be easy meat for one of dem sub boats now."

"You said it, Big Boy, but don't squawk till you're hit." And with this parting remark, the top-sergeant swaggered off with a gait that seems to be reserved for his rank.

After the top disappeared, Amos was included in a conference of five sons of hard luck who had slipped out on deck. Before the gathering men dispersed Amos craved to be out of it. But then it was too late. The group was part of Doremus' interrupted meeting. The crowning misfortune of broken engines had convinced them that the ship's hoodoo had reached a state that required drastic remedies. One party suggested corralling the thirteen black cats and tossing them overside to the

fishes. But another pointed out that the vessel had made successful voyages in spite of this feline handicap. The reason for the evils must be found somewhere else.

"Must be a Jonah on board," whispered a little corporal whose mind snapped back to the recent sermon.

"Sense to dat talk, boy. Who you suppose it is?"

"Well, ain't but one red-headed cullud boy riding on dis boat. And everybody knows what kind luck red-headed cullud folks creates."

"You referring at Doremus?" Amos inquired.

"Couldn't be nobody else."

After a short silence a low voice quavered, "But what can we do?"

"Well," was the answer, "ain't no better guide dan de Good Book is dey?"

"You mean——"

"Sho'. I mean, in plain words, dat dis heah red-headed Doremus is de cause of all de bad luck on de boat. And dat iffen he ain't done something wid, we sho' gonna bump into a German torpedo and unload in Kingdom Come."

"Done something wid?"

"Sho'. Didn't you hear what he said to-night when he was sermonizing? De sailors had bad

luck till dey chucked Jonah overboard. After dat everything was safe and easy."

"But," Amos whispered, his hair rising on end, "we can't chuck ole Doremus to de whales just 'cause he got red hair."

"Well, if we don't break the curse look like us'll all have to feed de fishes. It's us or Doremus. A Jonah is a Jonah and de whole is uniting. Can't do nothing but chuck him."

That was the sinister consensus. It looked as if Doremus would soon become a victim to the unfortunate text of his sermon. Amos would have liked to withdraw from the conference but it was too late now. In fact, his known friendliness toward the intended victim singled him out as an important actor in the plot.

The leader was a skinny leather-colored bad man from Arkansas. He outlined to Amos what he was expected to do, and he made it painfully clear what would happen if he failed.

"We gwine tell Doremus you wants to see him up heah on de back porch of de ship. When he finds you, Amos, you gotta get him to leaning over de top rail of de boat's fence. And while he's talking wid you we gang him. See? And over he goes."

"And what'll happen if I don't do it?"

"Well—you won't live long enough to get shot by no Germans."

Amos had no reason to doubt the threat. He took up his position at the rail and began to rack his head for a way to save the unsuspecting Doremus. He wished Willie was there to help him. He had some confidence in the trickier mind of his small friend. But at the moment Willie was in a discreet dice game in some remote corner of the big ship, and before he could be found the direst consequences might become realities.

Amos stared out over the black waters, feeling the crippled ship rise and fall beneath him. From the distant engine room came the dull clang of a hammer. The crew was doing all it could to repair the fractured metal.

But this wasn't helping the endangered Doremus. Amos anxiously examined the near-by equipment of the boat and finally lighted on a life-belt. And after contemplating it for a moment he became extremely busy in the dark.

Presently the huge bulk of Doremus loomed beside him.

"Brother Amos," he said, "boys down-stairs say you want to talk wid me 'bout de salvation of your soul."

" 'Tain't dat so much as de salvation of your body."

"Brother, don't pay no attention to de body. I don't care what happens to dis sinful carcass. But I sit up nights nursing my soul."

There came a sudden rush of feet across the dark deck. Doremus felt himself lifted by many hands. For a sickening moment he sailed through the air. Then icy water enveloped him. When he finally opened his mouth to yell, he pulled in a considerable section of cold Atlantic Ocean. An age passed before he came to the surface and felt air in his flooded lungs.

He tried to clear his throat for a good screech, when his thrashing arms encountered a smooth surface and his hand clutched something that floated. At the same time a warning hiss came down to him from the dark hulk of the transport.

Doremus had recovered sufficiently to note that he was holding one of those round life preservers he had seen on the ship's porch. A decided upward tug upon this buoy convinced him that his unseen friend had a rope tied to it and was trying to haul him skyward. The victim helped by pulling and climbing on the uneven joints where the steel plates met. In a moment he was standing safe,

but dripping, on the darkened deck of the steamer.

"It's me, Amos," whispered his deliverer.

"Who dat attack me?"

"Sh! Tell you later. Dey flipped you overboard and run. Dey may be back. Scoot down dat iron staircase. It'll bring you down to de cellar of the ship where de fire-room is. Dry yourself out and ack like nothing happened."

There was panic among the conspirators when Doremus appeared with no sign of his recent ducking. His reputation rose further when Amos assured the guilty five that their intended victim had not sunk when he hit the water and had flown back on to the deck by a few flaps of his arms.

During the night, repairs were completed and next day the *Triton's* engines were doing their accustomed twelve knots through the blue swells. Willie sought the languid Amos where he rested against a canvas-covered cargo winch.

"What's dis I hear, Amos? 'Bout that psalm-singing Doremus getting flung overboard?"

"It's a fack, Willie. Dey flang him into de water and he landed—plunk!—back on deck. Jest like old Jonah. Whale must of swallowed him and spit him on de boat again."

"Oh, boy, he must be a conjurer!" Willie's eyes were like saucers.

"He sho' must, Willie. Hope you'll be careful how you treat him. You're a friend of mine and I'd hate to see him lay de evil eye to you."

Willie hopped to his feet suddenly and retreated across the deck. Doremus had appeared. He came over to where Amos was stretched out absorbing sunshine. In spite of the sardined condition of the ship, the other soldiers gave Doremus enough room for them to talk without being overheard.

"Amos," began the devout one, "you sho' saved my life. Wish I could do something to pay you back. I'll pray for your soul."

"Prayer is all right, Doremus. But I'd rather have something I could use."

"What would you like?"

"Ain't but one thing would do me any permanent good. And I know you couldn't gimme dat."

"Speak up, Brother."

"Well, I wish I could beat dat Willie shooting craps. A man of prayer couldn't help me none wid dat."

Doremus rolled his eyes toward the blue heavens. "De ways of Providence is strange and providential!" he murmured.

"Do which?"

"I say de ways of Providence is beyond understanding!" He reached into the inner recesses of

his uniform and brought forth a very unregenerate-looking pair of dice. "See dem, Brother Amos? You is looking on de most perfect brace of craps ever was manufactured."

"What you doing wid 'em?"

"Well, before I saw de Light, I was a wild an' sinful boy. And I was in a sinful business. I worked in a factory where dey made dice. Used to put de spots on 'em, I did, and polish 'em down to de right shape and weight. Dis pair was made to order for my own pussonal use."

"Man, dey been used, I can tell dat."

"Before I see de error of my ways I was de most dangerous dice man in Alabama. I practised de science of throwing 'em and I studied de diffunt sizes. Got so I could throw about everything I wanted to. Used to give lessons for five dollars each. Dey called me de Dice Doctor. But when I got religion last summer I put all dat worldliness behind me."

"Was you winnin' when you quit?"

"Sho'."

"Why didn't you throw away the dice?"

"I decided to at first. But den I figgered I'd keep dem on me to test my strength. I had dem bones next my bosom ever since. Sometimes de

yearn to play wid 'em bring cold sweat to my brow. De Devil come sit on my shoulder and try to tempt me into gambling. I fought my battle and I got him in de run. Now, Brother, Providence preserved dese dice for a purpose. You is de purpose, Amos. Can't be no harm giving 'em to de boy what saved my life."

"Is dey winning dice?"

"Dey's on de level if dat's what you mean. But when I learn you how to handle 'em you can't lose. I been watching you shoot and your ignorance anguish me. Verily, Brother, I must take thee in hand and learn unto thee those innermost secrets of bone bouncing."

"Dat's fine, Doremus. But you know dem's pizen dice of Willie's?"

"Sho'. I noticed 'em. Dem dice so full of quicksilver you could stand 'em on edge. I'll have to abolish dem before I start your eddication."

Next day Doremous watched for his chance. While Willie was absorbed in the defrauding of a new band of patriots, the sandy-haired Nemesis swooped down suddenly and captured the bones. Pop eyes and sagging jaws were turned upon him. But no one dared protest now that Doremus was known to have superhuman powers.

Enveloped in an awful silence, he examined Willie's dice. He moistened them with his tongue, he massaged them between his yellow palms. He made three mysterious passes with his right hand and murmured some hair-raising abracadabra of magic. Again he listened to the dice as if to make sure that his sorcery had been accomplished. Then he laid the bones on the deck and walked away.

At last Willie came to.

"Dey was my dice," he said. "Fade me victims. I shoot it all."

But a dark hand swifter than his had snaked out and grabbed the two cubes. And a stern-faced gambler spoke the mind of his companions:

"Aw, naw, Willie! Dem dice of yourn was bad enough before. Now Doremus done laid de hoodoo on 'em and dey is through. 'Tain't even safe to leave 'em on our steamboat. Just one thing to do wid dem bones. Tell 'em good-by."

He stood erect and flung the dice with all his strength. Willie's horrified gaze followed the two freckled friends of his fortunes. They sailed in a slow wide arc and tumbled downward into the sea. He got to the rail in time to see them sink, turning slowly. As a crowning irony, they showed a four and three before they disappeared. There was an

awed silence broken at last by the languid drawl of Amos.

"Fish dat pick up dem dice sho' gonna skin de scales off de other fishes."

The rest of the voyage Doremus consecrated to the higher education of his friend. In secret practise he showed him how to obtain the powerful aid of old General Averages. This sounded so scientific that Amos had his doubts.

"I always shot dice by ear," he said. "You think I could learn all dis college dice you talk about?"

"Brother, wid faith and my knowledge I can learn you anything. Now den, you know de value of seven and you know de disaster of twelve. But dat 'bout lets you out. Watch, now, whilst de Old Master demonstrates."

Doremus shook the bones and let them loose. He threw a six and two—a most desirable point. His next throw was a five and three. He picked up the dice another way and shook them once more.

"Watch me seven," he said. And a seven it was.

"D-dog-gone!" murmured the awed Amos. "I I believe you is a conjurer."

"Well, boy, I'm gonna learn you de same kind of magic."

By application and practise, the higher phases

of dicing began to dawn for the student. If you knew how to pick up the bones intelligently, and to roll them out with equal skill, there were certain immense advantages to be had.

For instance, by hiding the six and four, it became impossible to throw a ten or a four which are difficult points to repeat; the only way to lose was to show a seven. Similarly, by putting the two aces or the two sixes in, you avoid throwing craps and can keep tossing them out until your point is achieved.

"Science demonstrates," orated Doremus, "de average in your favor is six hundred to two hundred. Dat ought to satisfy anybody."

"Sho' is enough for me," admitted the enlightened Amos.

But arithmetic alone was not sufficient. Under the merciless drilling of Doremus, our hero learned to pick up the dice so that they were faced properly and to do it with sufficient skill to keep razor thoughts out of the minds of victims. Also one must shake them without changing the placement. Also once more, one must roll them out evenly, so that they travel without twisting and ruining the set-up.

"Sometimes dey miss," admitted the instructor,

"but day in and day out, year in and year out, you bound to collect."

Lest the endless practise become irksome, Doremus regaled his pupil with fascinating lectures on the history and tricks of the ancient pastime. There was material that came in a bottle whose legitimate use was the healing of cuts; if you secreted some of it on your thumb you could patiently build up the ace of one dice until it was impossible for it to come to rest on that face. It gave you a five up and the advantages were numerous.

Gambling houses had dice with minute bits of steel secreted therein. Beneath the tables they rigged electric batteries which a distant and innocent-looking operative worked with his foot. Through this device, luck disappeared and the dice became slaves to the hidden switch. Yet there were horseshoe rings by means of which the wary were able to unmask such treacheries.

Between lessons one day Amos took a back look at his period of innocence.

"Never knew dey was so much brain work to craps," he observed.

"That's why you got nothing but exercise out of it," Doremus retorted.

Just before they landed the pious professor

ended his instructions with a congratulatory slap on the back.

"Brother," he said to Amos, "you've learned your berries good. Dey's a few little points we gotta brush up on. But you've earned your diploma. You can call yourself a crap shooter and not blush under your tan. Remember it's shootin' 'em square, but wid skill. I got my conscience to think of. I wouldn't learn you nothing dirty."

A new feeling of power came upon Amos. He caressed the dice in his hand.

"Hot dawg!" he said. "I'm rarin' to go. Lemme a dollar, Doremus. Wanna get started wrecking dis army."

"No, Brother. You must learn patience. Boy's ain't got dey minds on gambling now. We're disbarking from de ole skiff to-morrer. Practise your lessons good and lay low till pay call blows. Payday's de day for de big money."

CHAPTER XXI

The Chocolate Soldiers Come

The Two Black Crows felt a curious regret as a smart little destroyer splashed with red and yellow paint ushered them past the promontory of which Brest is a part. The submarine danger was past; the boat ride was over; and the hoodoos had not proved fatal. Willie even had the courage to scratch the backbone of the black cat which strolled disdainfully between the legs of the crowded soldiers.

Amos had dictated and mailed a letter to Camilla. In it he detailed a story calculated to unkink her hair. He told how he, single-handed, had saved the ship from destruction by a submarine, alleging that he sank the attacker with hand grenades.

"W-war ain't so bad," Amos observed to Willie.

They stood at the rail beside their packs and watched the lighthouse approach.

"Boy, remember you ain't seen nothing yet! You just finished the excursion part of it. You're

headed for de front now. Maybe some German's got a bullet with your name on it."

"Yeah? Well, while he's reading it I'll be signing him wid my razor."

"Where at do we go from de boat?"

"Sergeant say rest camp. Dat sho' sounds good."

"You ain't done nothing on de boat. You oughta be rested plenty."

"Boy, I ain't never gonna be overrested. Ole ship give me a vacation from potato peeling, and I sho' 'preciate that. But my fatigue is permanent and I can use as many rest camps as de army puts at my disposal."

Brest welcomed the latest addition of Western crusaders with its customary drenching. Company B formed on the stone quay and toiled up the steep street under full equipment. The regimental band was at the head of the column and to counteract the effects of the soggy weather the musicians played *Over There*—with an extra dash of jazz in it. The white officers had to keep stern eyes on the splattered brogans to prevent uncontrollable heroes from interpolating dance steps into the march beat.

By this time the good citizens of Brest were hardened to the arrival of American troops. However,

colored ones were a novelty. Fat housewives carrying long loaves of bread stopped to smile at the long column. Under dripping awnings, doughboys—wise from three weeks oversea—chaffed these dark reinforcements. Small boys in smocks and wooden shoes waded in the gutters beside the column and shouted, after the manner of small boys the world over.

"Vive les Américains!"

"Vive les soldats chocolats."

"Who dis Veeve Lay?" Amos wondered.

In the doorway of a brightly lighted bar leaned a small allurement of the type that officers pursue and sergeants acquire. She sang out to the newcomers in their own tongue.

" 'Ooray for de black Yanks."

"Dese heah Frog gals sho' is igerunt," Amos observed to himself, "me a Yank—and I come fum Tennessee!"

Hardened as they were to disappointments, a fresh shock awaited them at the rest camp. It was a long hike through soupy streets, and when they got there they found anything but rest. The next damp days were spent digging drainage trenches through bottomless mud and putting up tents. And just when it looked as if they might get a few free

breaths, they entrained and moved toward the front.

The trip was made in the famous railway wagons dedicated to forty men or eight horses. Somewhere up forward was the puniest locomotive the colored boys had ever seen. At the slightest provocation it let out a screech like a nervous old woman. Crowded in one corner Amos just had room to mask his dice rolls behind his coat. Willie was moody and thoughtful.

"Boy," he said, "we're getting closer and closer."

"Yeah. Dat's what travelin' does."

"Ain't you scared?"

"Well, maybe I is. But I keep my mind off it." And he rolled a seven in secret.

When the box cars finally let them out they found themselves in St. Jean, a town that duplicated a thousand others scattered over the fair face of France. There was a square with an ancient stone fountain in it, a church that seemed even older, and a collection of whitewashed houses with weathered tile roofs and smoking manure piles in front. Most important of all was a P. C. from which the affairs of the visiting heroes were directed. It usually had a motorcycle arriving or leaving. In and out all day bustled young lieutenants.

Amos' squad was led to a long low building by a sergeant who made a mark on a paper and informed them that this was to be their home. A pungent aroma insulted their noses and gave them a hint that was verified by the interior. Along two sides of the stone walls ran racks of foreign design but unmistakable intention. It was a stable, and it had been occupied to a very recent date by several untidy beasts of the field.

Amos looked around the sodden floor. There was no sign of a bed to be seen.

"Heah, heah!" he protested to the guide, "I ain't no horse. You can't bed me down in dis stall."

"Naw, you cain't," Willie backed him up.

The sergeant hooked his thumbs in his belt.

"Listen, Big Boy, ain't you learned yet that privates is in de army for just one thing—to do what they're told. I'm tellin' you dis is where you're gonna live. You're gonna live here and love it."

"Maybe you can make us live here, but you cain't make us love it. Man, what are we supposed to do? Stand and eat outa dem hay racks? In all dis damp? Why, we'll die of croup or something."

"Listen, are you as strong as an oxen?"

"Naw. Cose I ain't strong as an oxen."

"Well, you oughta seen the bunch of fine big

oxen that used to use this for a bedroom. If it made them strong, it ought to be good for you."

"Aw, man——" Amos began.

The sergeant was busy and didn't have time to keep the joke rolling. "Listen, you saps," he snapped out, "see that ladder over in the corner? Well, that gets you up into the hayloft. You're expected to bunk up there and not down here in the manure. There's plenty of straw above to lay your blankets on. And the roof'll keep some of the rain off you. Compree? Course if you don't like it after you've tried it just lemme know. I'll rout out the colonel and give you his château. And if the smell annoys you any, just go around to the P. C. and they'll issue you a can of eau-de-cologne that you can sprinkle around. Aw revaur, mess infants, as they say in France."

"Mess is right," muttered Amos as he dragged his pack up the steep ladder.

The fond hope that he had shaken the kitchen detail did not survive long. An ocean lay between him and his last potato peelings. But now that they were again on land, the onerous duties of K. P. were revisited upon him.

"We ain't trying to ride you, soldier," the sergeant bearing the bad news assured him, "but cap-

tain say we got to favor your feet. Condition of dem boats of yours is notorious."

"I'm bad luck's favorite son," Amos declared.

This camp was their last training position. Here, under the guidance of dapper little French officers, the soldiers from the South learned their last lessons before moving up close to the battling. Gas masks were issued, and there were drills showing what they were for. The active little Frenchmen also sought to teach one how to jump up out of a trench and make an advance without getting all one's most personal organs riddled by bullets. There was a post-graduate course in the flinging of hand grenades.

Amos had to take his turn at these pastimes. He shone best with the grenades, once he had conquered the urge to turn 'em loose and run as soon as he pulled the pin.

A captain of chausseurs complimented him one day after a cast that exploded beyond its objective.

"*Magnifique*, my dark brave!" he shouted. "You have but to reduce the parabola."

"Redooce the which, Cunnel?"

"Reduce the parabola. Or 'ow does one say, to cut down the range. You are shooting over ze mark. You are *très fort*—very strong. How ees

it you manage to cast them farther than any of the other *soldats?*"

"Dat's easy, Cunnel. All I do is 'magine I'm throwing away a potato and I sho' get distance."

CHAPTER XXII

Dice Is Dice the World Over

Of all things in the world, pay-day in the army is the slowest to reach its destination. But the longed-for bugle call finally sounded. To make the event more welcome the eager privates drew down thirty-three for the month—the extra three dollars being a premium for oversea service. As Amos waited in the line he could feel his two dice jumping in his pocket. They were raring to go.

The soldiers did not bother to put away their money. In an incredibly short time the familiar kneeling circles had formed, and the familiar exhortations arose.

Willie had determined to renounce the games since the loss of his favorite dice. In an inner pocket, nestled a bulging green roll circled by a string which he was determined to protect from erosion. From his crouched position Amos looked up and caught the sheepish eye of his friend.

"Aw—aw!" he exclaimed, "do you quit dice shooting, Willie?"

"Naw, but——"

"Yeah. I know dat 'but' all right. Fish done got your pet bones. Dice shooting is gambling for you now, Willie. If I was you I sho' would stay out. It ain't safe if you don't know what numbers is coming up."

"As you was, boy! I'll play when I get ready and wid who I wants."

"Dat's right, Willie," Amos taunted, "I just warn you don't play wid me, dass all. I'm a new man. As a crap shooter I been borned agin, and I don't want to impoverish my bosom friends. Better keep dat roll of yours hid. If ever I git a shot at it, you'll think it's been hit plunk in the middle by dat big Bertha cannon."

"Police your mouth, Amos. You talking wild."

"And I *is* wild, boy. I'm so wild you scared to gamble wid me. Here's my money. If I ain't too fearsome for you, kneel and fade me."

The taunts and the natural temptation were too much for Willie. He elbowed into the circle, produced the roll in question and removed its protective binding. The awed eyes of the dark soldiers gazed on the prize financial accumulation of the Third Battalion.

"Kiss it awree-vore, Willie. You're headed for de pore house."

"Talk with money, boy. Cover dis ten."

There began a game which developed into a general rout. By the time Amos had demonstrated Doremus' theories to his comrades in arms, he had all Willie's money and enough from other doubters to lift him into the class of A. E. F. capitalists.

The cached accumulation made one side of his chest bulge as if he had a watermelon hidden there.

As Amos rose from the sad and silent group, Willie put a restraining hand upon his sleeve.

"Boy," said Willie, "lemme look at dem dice."

Amos smote him with his own words.

"Dice is dice the world over, Willie." And with a grin he pocketed his twin treasures.

A twenty subtracted from the grand total found its way to the pocket of Doremus.

"Just give dat to de church," Amos directed to forestall objections from his teacher.

"Thank you, Brother," said the gratified master. "I see you learned your science right good. Don't spend dat money in foolishment, now."

The fame of Amos had gone abroad throughout the battalion. Came many doubters who had known what a poor diceman he had been of old. They expected the break to come with every shot because luck does not hold for ever.

But Amos was using science instead of luck and the expected reverse did not arrive. The bulge on the victor's bosom continued to grow.

"How much you made, Amos?" Doremus inquired, looking up from a second thank-offering of twenty bucks.

"Well, Doremus, I counted as high as I can and I got more dan dat. I must have a zillion dollars by now."

"Dat's fine, Brother. But remember, what de Good Book say: Be merciful. Don't ride 'em too hard."

"Dey never took de spurs out of my flanks when dey was riding me, Doremus. And my book say when things is coming your way don't holler halt."

Doremus' caution was well taken. Within a week Amos was known as the curse of the A. E. F. There was no one in the outfit who would shoot against him. He was forced to strategy to keep his hand in. One day he called the melancholy Willie to his side and held out a sheaf of bills.

"Willie," said he, "would you like to have dis heah hunderd dollars?"

"Have a heart, Amos. Don't razz your old podner like dat."

"Boy, I ain't razzing you. I'm asking if you'd like to have dis heah hunderd bucks. I'm askin' you serious."

Willie held out his eager palm. "Dat's talking like my old pal Amos. Cose I'd like to have de hunderd."

"Just a minute, Willie." He moved the bills out of reach. "One thing more—I'll give you de hunderd provided if and when you agree to shoot craps for it. Been so long since I had anybody fade me my knuckles is getting rusty. Gotta do something to keep the old right hand greased and supple. De hunderd is yours if you'll shoot me for it."

"I'm on," agreed Willie but with lessened enthusiasm.

In half an hour, Willie rose from the floor and dusted off his knees. The hundred dollars was again intermingled with Amos' financial status.

"Thank you, Willie," the magnate said as he put the roll to bed in his bosom. "Sho' was nice of you to go through de motions wid me."

But what good is money if you can't spend it? You can smoke only so many cigarettes. There is a limit to the number of chocolate bars one may consume.

Amos craved to exchange his wealth for the pastimes of the fortunate, in lights, liquor and laughter. Such things were not permitted in the bounds of the camp. There were strict orders against selling colored soldiers strong drink, and alert officers aided by a case-hardened squad of M. P.'s saw to it that the natives controlled this avarice.

"Dog-gone," Amos complained as he viewed his cash one night, "look like dis money'll get all wore out 'fore I can circulate any of it."

"Well," suggested Willie, "you don't have to spend money. You could become one of dese heah philanterpists. You could give it away. Make yourself happy by making your fellow soldiers happy."

Amos bored him with a skeptical eye.

"If Doremus was talking pious like dat I might believe it. But wid you, Willie, I know you just trying to make a dent in my accumulation."

He had about given up hope when opportunity honked outside his kitchen door. Amos walked out with a half-undressed potato in his hand to see what was wanted. It was the skinny supply sergeant, and he was at the wheel of a mud-spattered Ford truck. Willie's head, surmounted by a monkey cap, was grinning out the back.

"Come on, soldier," the sergeant hailed Amos, "I'm gonna take you and your friend for a buggy ride."

A single motion and Amos had deposited himself beside his buddy in the truck.

"As you was!" bawled the sergeant. "Put down dat potato and take off dat apron and get on your blouse and monkey cap. I can't go traipsin' round the country wid a half-clothed soldier. *Allez!* Make it snappy!"

Before he was half through with the order, Amos had obeyed and was back in the shuddering Lizzie.

"Tromp on it, Sarge," he said. "Let's go."

They whirled through the little town taking the turns on two wheels. Sentries and M. P.'s stood aside when the sergeant flashed passes on 'em.

In their wisdom the gods forbid that men should foresee what is in store for them. It was fortunate that the two soldiers in the Ford could not see where they were headed or they could hardly have enjoyed the ride. In happy ignorance they watched the last of the little town fly past. The long road opened ahead between its sheltering columns of trees.

Amos and Willie drank in a long breath of the free sunshiny air.

"Aw, boy!" they breathed in happy chorus.

"Hey, Sarge," Amos hailed after a blissful pause, "where at we are going?"

"Gimme a cigarette," answered the bouncing non-com from the seat. "Going?" he repeated when he had the pill burning. "We going over here to San Germane sur Something. 'Bout twenty-five kilometers."

"Hot dawg, Sarge! Kill dem kilometers, boy! Let's see what dis ole Lizzie's got in her. Hey, Sarge?"

"Yeah?"

"What we going to dis heah German sand place to fetch?"

"Supplies."

"Yeah—but what kind of supplies?"

The answer fell like a blight upon his happiness. "We're going for potatoes," said the sergeant.

CHAPTER XXIII

Cone-Yacks and Tonga Bok

Amos' depression disappeared as they neared their destination. The town was an important crossroads of war traffic. It hummed with hurried life. Detachments of Americans went marching by, and French troops of all colors. Soldiers sat at cafés. A bar of tantalizing music floated up from a side street. Amos looked down at the prosperous bulge of his blouse and took heart. After all one should get to the point where potatoes are accepted as are other evils that must be endured. The world provided a great many cheerful counterbalances.

The flivver careened into a street jammed with traffic and chattered to a full stop between a huge gray army truck and a man with a push-cart.

"Hey, Sarge," called Amos, "how's your throat?"

"Dry as hell."

"Then halt somewheres. Ain't I goin' to buy?" The driver was violently affected by the last words. He opened the throttle and turned into a side street.

What did he care if he had to usurp part of a sidewalk and incur the deadly glances of outraged pedestrians?

An old waiter with a limp was mopping a glass-topped table on the sidewalk and murmuring, *"M'sieus?"*

"White man say what kind of drinks will you have?" translated the sergeant.

"Gin," said Amos.

"Gin," said Willie.

"All right,"—and to the waiter—"listen yere, Mr. Frog, we want three cone-yacks. Compree—THREE!" The last was said in a very loud voice. To be sure he was understood the sergeant displayed a trio of black fingers. The old waiter smiled, nodded and limped into the bar. Willie and Amos were greatly impressed by the linguistic powers of their superior.

"You sho' talk dis Frog language good," Amos admired. "Is it hard to learn, Sarge?"

"Well, course I've picked up a lot of it but a few words is all you really needs to get around wid. If you want wine all you says is van-blonk or van-roosh. But if you want licker with a kick, you gotta call for cone-yack. Dat's what I'm getting for you boys. Was I wrong?"

"I'd rather have gin," insisted Amos, "but I'll try dis cone-yack you talk 'bout."

A first experiment proved the taste to be unfamiliar. But the effects were unmistakable. A warm and happy feeling took possession of their stomachs. They repeated the treatment. By the time they had lost count, Amos was in such a glow that he could have kissed the Kaiser. Yet something was lacking.

"Look here, Sarge," he said, ramming a fist full of uncounted change into his pocket, "dis is a nice place and de drinks is plenty potent. But it's too public here on de sidewalk and dey ain't enough excitement. Suppose dis town's got any catfish places? Where it ain't so quiet and polite?"

"Maybe. Le's ramble and see."

"Attaboy, Sarge," Willie shouted. "Le's ramble."

They hauled themselves aboard the U. S. A. flivver but to pause and set their course.

"We crossed a river coming in here," ventured Amos, "place to look for catfish restaurants and gin parlors is down by de levee. Le's ask dis white man coming here.—Oh, mister, where at is de levee to dis town?"

"Levee, levee!" Willie and the sergeant shouted at the astonished citizen.

The astonished citizen worked his shoulders, hands and whiskers up and down, gave some answer and cut around a corner so fast that his coat-tails stood out straight behind him. It was well known throughout France—including such portions as were held by the Germans—that all Americans were crazy. And this Frenchman went on the assumption that the degree of their madness increased with the depth of their color. He was taking no chances with these three black musketeers who were evidently well stoked with alcohol.

"What'd he say?" demanded Willie.

"Sound like, 'Jennie say pa,' " Amos answered. "De words was good American but way he put 'em together dey was just foolishness. Don't help us find no levee."

The sergeant had a suggestion. "We better deploy and hunt for it in skirmish formation."

"Why use your feet?" demanded Amos who was thinking of his own. "Here we is nice and comfortable settin' in de car. Lissen to dis and see how it sounds: If the town's got a levee, it's down by the river—ain't it? Well, did you ever see a town had a river where de river was up on a hill?"

"I never knew one," admitted Willie.

"I is," said the sergeant who had traveled. "I

been to Noo Orleens when de old Mississippi was up on a hill higher dan de town."

"Don't projeck wid me, Sarge," Amos protested. "Rivers is always down at de bottom of de bluff, don't make no diffunce what town you's in. All we got to do here is run down-hill and we'll end up where de fish restaurants is."

The suggestion sounded reasonable. They were already pointed down-hill. The sergeant took the brakes off and let the truck roll. They had to hold tight because the uneven cobbles made their progress a series of wild back-jumps.

With the wind whistling in his ears, Amos raised his voice in exultant song. The others joined in when they caught the tune:

"—ride and shine
And pay my fine,
When I ride on de dummy,
On de dummy, dummy line!"

Before the wheels of the charging Lizzie, the good citizens and citizenesses dived into protecting doorways. A fat red arm reached out a window and yanked up an endangered infant. Amos got a feather in his mouth when a flock of ill-advised chickens fled squawking across their path. Imprecations followed their flight.

By a feat possible only for persons in their cups, the sergeant brought the Ford safely around two hairpin curves and to a stop at a wall. Beyond, the dismounting soldiers caught sight of a broad cobbled street bordering a blue river hedged with waving sycamore trees.

"Hot dawg!" Amos exclaimed, "I knowed we'd find de levee. Is dey any signs of a catfish house?"

"Don't see no catfish house," said Willie. "But dere's a rat house over there."

They followed his pointing finger. He indicated a dingy building on the corner that displayed the crude portrait of a rat on its back, with all four feet turned to the sun. Above it were the words, "Le Rat Mort."

"What do de readin' say?" Amos asked.

"Say rat's name was Mort."

"Funny name for a rat, but dis here's a funny country."

"Looks like the kind of place we're hunting," the sergeant volunteered. "See dem Frog soldiers coming out wiping dere chins?"

"Well, my chin's dry and my throat is like a cinder."

With determined but unsteady steps they advanced on the building at the double-quick.

The interior was promising. It was dark and it smelled unmistabably inviting. Dim figures lounged at tables. Beside the grimed window shone dull nickeled fixtures and the inevitable bottles. Over them peered a broad sallow face with black brows that met above the nose. The forehead was a half-inch strip of wrinkles, crowned by a nap as thick and stiff as a currycomb.

"*M'sieus?*" grinned the proprietor, showing an extensive need of bridge work.

"Three cone-yacks," said Willie, Amos and the sarge.

"Ah, I onderstand," the proprietor was proud of a chance to prove he could speak their tongue, "the 'eroes *Américains* desire nine cognacs. They are mighty drinkers."

"Bring 'em three at a time," directed Amos. "It sho' is a pleasure to meet up with a Frog gentleman what can speak American. W-where at did you learn it?"

The flattered proprietor was pouring golden liquid into three glasses. "Ah," said he, "many, many soldiers *Américains* pass thees way to the front. They come to my place where one gets large drinks for the small price. I am always 'appy to serve them."

He turned to attend a new customer, and three dark hands reached forward to lift the golden distillation. But they paused before their lips found the brims.

Leaning against the bar was the widest and darkest colored boy the three revelers had ever seen. He was so black there was an undertone of blue in his complexion. He wore a horizon blue cap very much to one side and a French uniform.

Amos, Willie and the sergeant listened with arrested drinks and popping eyes while this colored boy and the bartender exchanged volleys of angry language. That some request was being denied was evident by the vigor with which the proprietor shook his head and spun out chains of, "*Non, non, non!*"

As if to appeal from this refusal, the wide black soldier lurched around. The motion jostled and spilled Willie's drink.

"Here, bituminous!" cried the bereaved Willie, "careful who you're bumping. I may have to climb your frame."

The soldier in horizon blue glared and retorted in a string of gutturals that sounded like water bubbling from a jug.

"Listen here, Black Boy," said Willie angrily, "don't make funny sounds when I talk to you. I

may not be as black as you is, but I'm twice as tough."

"Take it easy, Willie," Amos warned.

Another burst of gutturals and an even more insulting look from the blue-black stranger.

"I don't know what you called me," Willie cried, "but I take it off of nobody!"

There was a flash of light and a razor appeared in his fingers. It was answered by another flash; the great-grandfather of all knives was gripped in the hand of the stranger.

"To the rear, Willie," whispered Amos.

Willie had already retreated behind him.

The blue-black soldier struck an attitude of the utmost ferocity. He invited, he implored attack.

But the proprietor was leaning over the bar patting the air with his hands and trumpeting through his nose. Peace was his desire. He appealed to the belligerents in alternate French and English.

"How come dat boy wants to carve us?" Amos demanded.

" 'E does not want to 'arm you," protested the man behind the bar. " 'E thinks your leetle friend is going to massacre 'im."

"Well, w-why don't he talk when a cullud brother asks him a civil question?"

"*Sacré!* My friends, do you no understand. Thees soldier is a Senegalese. A soldier of France from Africa."

"From A-fricka!" exclaimed Amos, examining the dark ferocity with a more friendly gaze.

"*Oui, oui!* From Africa. 'E ees a good boy, but 'e does not know when one should stop drinking. 'E has plenty liquor and 'e wishes for more."

"Aw, man, don't be so moral. Let him have another drink."

"*M'sieu* does not understand. It is not that I care 'ow much 'e drinks; 'e 'as no more money with which to pay."

"Is dat all?" exclaimed Amos.

He yanked out his money and showed it to the late enemy.

Amos and his friends were too far gone to notice that this flaunting of wealth caused a restless movement among the vague shadows about tables in darker corners of the dive. He advanced toward the Senegalese with an open palm that could only mean friendship.

"Tell dis heah boy," he directed the proprietor, "that I got more money than Mister Rockyfeller and that all black men is my brothers. Tell him to put dat butcher knife back and lean his bread basket

up against the bar. He joins our drinking party and I foots the bills."

Peace was instantaneous. The long knife disappeared, and Willie pocketed his razor. It developed that the name of the Senegalese was Tonga Bok and that he could smile when occasion demanded. When they turned back to the bar his arm was about Willie's shoulder. A beautiful friendship had been launched.

"Name your pizen, Tonga," Amos directed.

CHAPTER XXIV

The Meanest White Man Alive

Tonga Bok proved to be excellent company. Glasses were filled and emptied in a numberless succession.

At last through the pleasant fog in the sergeant's head, an unpleasant memory intruded. It seemed there was a war and that he started out that morning on a commission directly connected with the same. A Ford and a load of potatoes disturbed his subconscious mind and the realization finally dawned that he was expected to put the one into the other and drive back to camp.

" 'S time t' go," he managed to say.

Nobody embraced the invitation.

"Don't he sound like a sergeant?" Amos asked the swaying Senegalese. "I never yet see a sergeant didn't want to bust up any merriment and do something nobody wanted to do."

Tonga Bok didn't understand but he liked this big rich African from the United States and he said, "*Oui, oui.*"

"Listen at dat," laughed Willie. "Anybody ever hear such funny talk? Wee-wee! Sounds like a pig caught in a gate."

"I tell you we gotta go," insisted the sarge, "p'tatoes—ole Lizzie—back t' camp."

"Well, you go on," suggested Amos whose objections had been strengthened by a hated word, "we ain't asking you to stay. B' don' try to bust up our party. Garsong, more cone-yacks."

Opposition brought out all the stubbornness in the sergeant's make-up. He became as firm as iron. They must leave and that was all there was to it. His insistence finally penetrated the alcoholic haze of which Amos and Willie were the center. Come to think of it, there was a war and they were in the army. The uniforms proved it. Things might happen if they didn't obey the sergeant.

Amos fished out his still swollen roll.

"W-what's de bad news, Mister Frog? How much us boys owe you?"

The beady eyes dwelt greedily on the money. The cunning Gallic brain made a rapid estimate of how much he could charge and get away with.

"*M'sieus*, that will be tree 'underd francs."

"Aw, man, I can't count dese Frog-skins. Here's more'n you ought to have. Jest keep the change."

Amos sprinkled a handful of five-dollar bills on the cracked counter and returned his fortune to his pocket. The four black crusaders turned unsteadily toward the door.

Right then things began to happen. Shadows leaped at them from the rear of the dark room. Something heavy landed on the back of Amos' monkey cap, striking a constellation of dancing stars. A blade caught the light and the sergeant squealed as he felt a keen point sear his shoulder.

"Help!" yelled Willie. "Police!"

"Shut up," panted Amos, "and pull dis panther off my back."

"*Courage!*" screamed the Senegalese laying about him mightily with the leg yanked from a chair.

The combatants fell in a hopeless mixture of arms and legs. The semi-darkness of the room made indistinct this mêlée of dark soldiers. It was difficult to distinguish friend from foe. It might have been that which saved them from fatal injuries. The combatants rolled over and over. Tables and chairs crashed under them.

"Watch de money, Amos!" yelled the sergeant.

"Jest bit a finger dat was reaching for it," panted the struggling Amos.

The aproned proprietor had rushed into the street and was leaping up and down wringing his hairy paws.

"*Au secours!*" he yelped. " 'Elp! Police! *Au secours! Les salles Américains.* 'Elp!"

Inside the combat raged furiously. The participants were too busy to note that the patron's cries ceased suddenly and that other footsteps hurried with his into the room. The first warning they had was the awful word: "Ten-shun!"

Automatically, Willie and Amos straightened up. Hands to the side, chests out and stomachs pulled in. A crash and tingle of glass in the rear told them that their attackers had retreated without bothering to raise the intervening sash. The sergeant and Tonga Bok had also disappeared. Amos felt a comforting lump on his bosom. Thank heaven the money was safe!

The proprietor had brought in an American captain flanked by a corporal and a doughboy. Any desire for flight was scotched by the round nozzles of two businesslike automatics which the enlisted men leveled at the rigid colored soldiers. The officer's back was to the light and they could not see his face. He was listening to the proprietor's explanation.

"In other words," the officer snapped, cutting off a stream of invectives, "they got drunk, started a fight and wrecked your place?"

"*Mais oui!* That is it, *mon Capitaine.*"

"Get 'em out in the light, Corporal. Let's have a look at 'em."

Prodded by the business ends of the pistols, Amos and Willie were placed against the wall on the narrow sidewalk. Dazzling shafts from the smiling sun struck them full in the eyes and the cognacs still fogged their vision. After a time Amos achieved a focus. He took a good look at the officer and his face lit in a glow of recognition.

"If it ain't Mister Davis," he cried, stepping forward. "Mister Davis from our old home town. Look, Willie, it's our old friend. We sho' is glad——"

"As you were!" snarled the corporal, ramming his automatic a full two inches into Amos' collection of cognac.

"Keep an eye on 'em, Corporal," snapped Davis.

It was Captain Davis by now. Captain Davis, more overbearing and swaggering than ever under his promotion, but looking one hundred per cent. soldier nevertheless. He turned to the proprietor.

"I know these men," said he, "but I make no

excuses for them." Whirling on the culprits he sneered. "It's getting so an officer can't pass down the street without being called in to settle a row by some of our soldiers. If they'd saved their fighting for the Germans the war would have been over long ago. You two are a disgrace to the army and to the United States. Are you quartered here?"

"Nossir, Cap'n, sir. We're quartered down the road a piece."

"Then where are your passes?"

"The sergeant's got 'em, Cap'n, sir."

"And where's he?"

"He's gone."

The captain frowned and bent an ear to something the Frenchman was whispering. He glared more fiercely than ever at what he heard.

"Perhaps you're right. There's a lot of robberies. Our outfit's full of bad eggs. Corporal, search these men."

The corporal did a thorough job. They took Willie first. All they got out of him was a damaged pocket knife, two buttons and a cigarette package with one fractured pill in it.

While they were touring his pockets Amos shut his eyes and prayed. It did no good. The con-

scientious corporal ran his questing hand inside Amos' lumpy blouse and came out with the roll. Also the dice which had earned it. Amos felt as if this hand had torn out his very heart. He made a desperate effort to recall regulations governing converse with officers. Finally he ventured:

"Captain Davis, sir, Private Amos Crow, of Buford, Tennessee, presents his compliments, hopes you are well, and craves to be allowed to speak."

"Where did you get all this money?" The captain was holding the roll now.

"Cap'n, sir, I win dat money fair and square in dice games."

"Dass right," Willie piped in a small weak voice.

"Yes? It would take forty years to get this much from army crap shooters. It looks very suspicious to me. Especially since I remember something about the part of this Private Amos Crow. I happen to know that you were involved in a robbery in your home town. No one suspected you then. But it looks now as if you got away with the money and didn't start spending it till you got across to France."

Amos stood speechless before this accusation. The injustice of it was too much for Willie.

"Nossir, Cap'n," he said. "Amos didn't take that bank money. He win this roll shooting craps like he said."

"Yes? Well of course you'd back him up. You always were in on everything with him. What else did he have on him, Corporal."

"This, sir."

The corporal handed over an envelope wrinkled and badly worn about the edges. In spite of the grime that covered it Captain Davis' heart missed a beat as he recognized the name, "Steve Rhinehart," and the sloping feminine hand in which it was written.

"Aw, Cap'n," Amos blurted out, "gimme back my money and dat letter. I promise Miss Mary Jane I'd never let nobody git it from me."

"Silence!" snarled the corporal, forcing Amos back against the wall with his pistol muzzle.

Davis ignored the protest. He calmly ripped open the letter and, standing wide-legged, read it twice. Then before Amos' scandalized gaze he tore the paper into small bits and scattered them on the wind.

Pocketing Amos' bank roll, Davis turned to the problem of what was to be done with them. To the barkeeper he said:

"A fine mess for me to butt into. I'm on my way to the front to-night with my outfit. Can't stick around to see these two get what's coming to 'em. But it wouldn't be right to turn 'em loose. It's a job for the M. P.'s and of course you never see any of those birds when they really are needed."

"Yes, sir," said the corporal.

Amos and Willie waited silently. With long faces, they contemplated the unhappy end of what promised to be a bright outing. Davis frowned at them for a minute, pulling a point of his little dark mustache. At last he turned to the innkeeper who had stood expectantly by while the inquisition was going on.

"Have you any place here where—any room that would hold these men?"

"Perhaps, *mon Capitaine*, there is beneath my shop w'at you call the cave. It 'as one door, an 'eavy door which may be securely barred."

"Good. Corporal, throw these men down there and lock 'em in. We'll have M. P.'s sent to get them. I will take care of the money."

"The cave is theese way," the café proprietor said as he led them inside.

"Get going," the corporal barked to Amos and

Willie. And under his breath he added grave reflections on their parentage.

Amos' feet had never felt so heavy in his life as they did when he preceded the guards into the dim little buffet which, but a few minutes before, had been the scene of so much damp delight.

CHAPTER XXV

A Buggy Ride with the Frogs

There comes a tide in the life of every man when his fortunes ebb to such a state that his only comfort lies in a conviction that nothing worse can happen. Amos and Willie were sure they had attained this extreme of bad luck.

They found themselves on the damp floor of a cellar lighted by a narrow and dirty window. The only other occupants were empty wine casks. When the heavy jar of bolts at the stair top told them they were prisoners, they explored every corner of the hole. They were more sober now and the hope that some of the wine barrels might offer them damp consolation was dispelled by a thorough canvass. All were empty and they insulted the prisoners with an odor that was stale but reminiscent.

The whites of four eyes were the only things distinctly visible. For a time the two blinked at each other like a pair of caged and unhappy owls.

"Well," Amos sighed at last, "h-heah we is."

"Yeah. Heah we is. And, boy, when dey come to let us out dey'll lead us into more trouble."

"Well, I'd rather not discuss it."

"Boy, I don't blame you. You sho' induced your best friend into an awful mess."

"I got you into it? W-what did I do?"

"Well, for one thing you was too free with your money. If you hadn't flashed it so rash, dem Frog boys up-stairs wouldn't have tried to gang us."

"Well, w-what you got to complain about? You're lucky side of me. I lose all my money and I lose dat letter Miss Mary Jane gave me case I ever find dat Rhinehart boy."

Willie saw one ray of hope. "Maybe the court marshal won't bear down on us. And after we come out we can get back de money."

"Boy, you sho' is hopeful 'bout my money. I done kissed it good-by."

"You don't think Cap'n Davis would keep it, do you?"

"Listen, Ivory; you 'member the time way back in Buford when dat Davis man said he give me two bits to tote some candy out to Miss Mary Jane's? Well, I never got the two bits. Dat was just the same as knocking me down on de ground and robbing me. And if he'd take two bits from a pore boy dat needed everything from a hat down to an

overcoat what chance I got of ever seeing more'n a thousand dollars?"

"Maybe you're right."

"Ain't no may-bees about it. He took my money and nobody'll ever hear about it. Dat is de meanest white man in de world. He is meaner dan fifteen thousand polecats. He is meaner dan a silo full of rattlesnakes. I wish I had a woods lot a hunderd miles square and I wish he was hanging on every tree. I hope when he gets to de front de Germans shoot him into little bitty pieces."

Willie observed that talk of this sort didn't help any.

"W-what you know 'bout whether it helps me or not? Long as we're here with nothing to do I might as well be wishing him bad luck. Only thing pains me is I cain't think of anything mean enough to fit 'im."

"You sho' got him told," Willie said admiringly.

After a time the faint bar of light disappeared. It had grown dark outside. The only sounds that came down to them were the muffled tread of men in the room above and the vibration from the cobbled street when a heavy camion or artillery piece rumbled by. They tried to sleep on the uneven

stone floor, but the best they could achieve was a fitful doze.

The imprisoned Crows had lost all estimate of time when there was a cautious rattle of the bolts overhead and the squeak of a stealthily opened door.

"Get up, Willie," Amos said, "here come the soldier police to arrest us."

Willie sat up and blinked at the oncoming light. It was a candle and two men were carrying it cautiously down the stairs.

When their faces appeared behind the wavering flame Amos exclaimed, "Well, I be dawg!"

Instead of M. P.'s their visitors were the beady-eyed proprietor and Tonga Bok, their blue-black warrior friend from Senegal. The latter was carrying some clothing and what appeared to be a pair of inverted stew pans. While Amos and Willie wondered at these things, the innkeeper began an explanation.

"The *Américain* police 'ave not sent for you. While I wait for them this M'sieu Tonga Bok return and say that 'e will rescue you." He refrained from explaining that Tonga Bok made dire threats against his person and his place if his offer was not accepted.

"Sho' was nice of you, Mister Bok," Amos said, smiling at their deliverer.

"How's he gonna save us?" demanded the skeptical Willie. "We been reported to de M. P.'s. We ain't got no pass. Minute we get out dey nail us and we goes to de jug."

"But no! It is that which your friend 'as planned to prevent. Regard what he has here—it is French overcoats and the millinery of steel for the trenches."

The Senegalese understood his motions, if not his English words. With a reassuring grin, he placed a steel helmet of French design on the surprised domes of Amos and Willie. Then he helped them into the long blue-gray overcoats.

The innkeeper stepped back and held the candle high.

"Presto!" he exclaimed proudly. "We have converted you into Senegalese, *M'sieus*. Now you may walk the streets without fear of your own police. The town is full of French Africans and one can not tell you from them. You 'ave the same complexion of coal, you have the same uniform. *Bien!* It is done."

"*Bien, bien!*" grinned their deliverer.

Amos and Willie were turning round and round

in the dim light. They studied their transformations as a fine lady studies a new gown in the fashion shops of the Rue de la Paix. The overcoats had not been selected with any view to the size of the wearer, so that Willie's nearly touched the floor.

"Willie, you sho' look comical in dat horse blanket," said Amos.

"Well, you don't look like no tailor-made soldier," retorted the other.

It suddenly occurred to both that they had failed to thank their friend from Africa. They did it now, smiling, shaking his hand and nodding their heads to indicate their pleasure. Tonga Bok grinned and nodded back.

"But 'urry," warned the innkeeper whose candle and patience were getting low, "the police may appear any minute."

"Won't dey climb all over you if dey find us gone?"

"Climb over——" repeated the Frenchman, mystified by the slang.

"Won't dey cause you trouble for letting us out?"

The man laid a dirty finger to the side of a bulbous nose and winked with one beady eye.

"I 'ave too much cleverness for that. My shop is closed. I feex the door so it look as if you 'ave escape. Theese police and I are not the best of friends. But I pray, I beg be queek! You may be too late."

He led the way up the steep steps, the Senegalese and the Two Black Crows following.

"But Mister Frog Man," Amos called, "where at do we go from heah?"

"Follow Tonga Bok. He will take you to his camp. There he will hide you among those of your own color and give you food. *Au voir et bonne chance!*"

After they had gone he made an insulting gesture and consigned them all to the keeping of the devil.

They slipped along through the shadows of the dimly lighted streets following their guide. Amos' feet had begun to pain him long before the march was finished. It came to an end at a long string of French army trucks lined up before an imposing courtyard. Tonga Bok showed by signs that they were to get inside one of the camions. They complied and he left, returning a moment later with two hunks of bread and two black bottles of wine. He made drinking motions with the

bottles and chewing motions as he handed the bread.

"Wee-wee!" said Amos, "boy, I know how to eat and drink in any language."

"Thanks, Tonga," said Willie. "You sho' is one white African cullud man. If you ever come to Buford, Tennessee, we'll good time you to death."

Their rescuer left them to dine in silence. Amos and Willie rooted around in the heavily laden truck until they found a bale of blankets. Burrowing beneath the warming coverings they began their delayed meal. After Willie had tugged at his loaf for a while he observed.

"Dog-gone, Amos, you reckon dat boy made a mistake in the dark and brung us something dat wasn't bread?"

"Naw," answered Amos between chews, "dis here's regular Frog bread. Ain't you heard dey never waste anything in dis country? Well, bread for de soldiers is made out of dust from flour mills ground up wid old autobeel tires."

"Taste like dat all right."

"Old van-blonk ain't hard to inhale though."

A long gurgle in the dark answered him more eloquently than words.

When they got tired wrestling with the bread

they were ready for sleep. Digging still deeper under the blankets they sank into a dreamless oblivion. It had been a long and awful day. Complete fatigue, with the wine on top of it, made them sleep like dead men.

Amos awoke suddenly with a feeling that he was being bounced up and down in the air like a rubber ball on a sidewalk. It took him some time to get his head out of the mound of supplies and peer through a slit in the canvas above. It was a rainy gloomy day. He remembered, now. He had been put into the truck the night before by their Senegalese friend. It was painfully evident that the truck was going somewhere in a great hurry.

Amos reached down to where gentle snores told him Willie was to be found. He shook the oversize French overcoat until his friend regained consciousness.

"Willie, get up. We done been kidnapped by the Frog Army."

"Huh?" said Willie, sitting up and rubbing bloodshot eyes.

"You heard me, boy. I say we done been kidnapped by the Frog Army. Look out, if you don't b'leeve me."

Willie complied. All he could see was an end-

less column of other camions swaying and lurching down a white road full of puddles, lined by tall trees. They were carrying black soldiers like Tonga Bok.

"Oh, boy," said Willie, "I sho' wish we was home in our nice stone stable."

"Yeah? Well, wishing won't take you dere."

"Let's jump down and run."

"And get a bullet in de pants? Boy, you forget. We ain't got no place to run to. Police is after us. We're A. W. O. L. Nothing to do but lay low and hope dis buggy ride won't end disastrous."

CHAPTER XXVI

Steve on a Desperate Chance

A shell-splintered and gas-poisoned wilderness in northeastern France. Morning brought with it a steady autumn drizzle. From the wounded earth rose a ghostly haze which penetrated the very marrow.

A little band of Yanks moved cautiously behind protecting underbrush and tried to see beyond the mists that shut them in. After a hasty breakfast on what remained of cold canned willy and beans they looked to their arms. Sights were wiped clean; breeches opened and closed cautiously; clips of steel-jacketed bullets were slipped into place. In shallow holes that might any minute become their graves, the men settled down to wait. The detachment had fallen victim to a virtue that was constantly being criticized in the doughboys—they had advanced too fast. They had been told to occupy and hold Hill 320. They had occupied and were now holding Hill 320. But——

They had smashed forward with such rapidity that they lost contact with the outfits on each side.

In the consolidation that followed the attack, they became isolated on their hill. The wily old Boche, quick to seize upon tactical errors, had closed in his lines and was now between the beleaguered band and the main American force. Hill 320 had become a tiny American island in a vast sea of Germans.

In a dugout on the crest of the little hill a council of war was being held. It included a lieutenant-colonel who refused to do his fighting from dugouts, a captain, one shavetail and four sergeants. But you could not have told one rank from the other. They were all soaked with water and plastered with mud. Five-day beards gave them a most villainous aspect. A sergeant with a bandaged arm was reporting after a hasty tour of inspection.

"We've got one hundred and eighty-nine men, sir," he said to the ranking officer, "disposed as directed. The four machine-guns command paths and gullies where the climbing would be easiest. We have about three rounds of ammunition left to each rifle. And there are some hand grenades."

"How about the wounded?"

"Nothing serious, sir. We went so fast that all who were badly hurt were left behind. Our worst case is a gassed prisoner."

"How many prisoners are there?"

"Seven, sir."

"I wonder why the damned Boche doesn't attack."

The captain spoke: "Probably waiting to blow us off with artillery or drive us out with gas."

"And there's no indication that we're going to be rescued."

"Well, I guess headquarters thinks we're killed or captured."

"Hell's bells! Can't we let 'em know we're not?"

At this question all turned toward the young second lieutenant.

In spite of a sandy stubble and the dirt that covered his face an onlooker from Buford, Tennessee, would have recognized in this young officer Steve Rhinehart, late man of all work at the railroad depot, at present serving as second lieutenant in the Signal Corps under his alias of Charles Miller. Even without the dirt and beard he would have appeared harder, tougher, browner than when we last encountered him at Jefferson Barracks.

"We can't get a message through," Rhinehart said in answer to the questioning looks.

"Can't?" The lieutenant-colonel considered it an unsoldierly word.

"We're out of touch with all our wire-lines. Our wheel equipment was blown to smithereens—along with its men. There's no sun for a heliograph. And any man trying to wigwag would last about ten seconds with the Boche sharpshooters."

"You know all the impossibilities," frowned the commander.

"I've been skirmishing around," Rhinehart continued, "and I have an idea."

"Shoot," said the captain hopelessly.

"Well, I've been talking to old Otto——"

"Who is old Otto?"

"He's the fat prisoner. I speak German and I sort of got on the good side of him by giving him first aid and half a cigarette. He's a sausage-maker from Munich and he has a cousin in Chicago. I come from Illinois. He felt friendly toward me."

"What did you get out of him?" the lieutenant-colonel asked with awakening interest. This kid might not be so dumb after all.

Rhinehart continued: "Old Otto's a corporal and he savvies the Boche army system. He says that we haven't been attacked because they think we are at least a regiment strong. They are sure of us and they are taking their time. They can close

in with artillery whenever they want to and finish us off. At present they are consolidating the line of trenches between us and our own forces. But the thing that gave me my idea was this—the outfit we attacked, the one Otto belonged to, was relieved last night. His was Bavarian. It has been relieved by one from Silesia."

"Umph!" grunted the captain, as he chewed a twig. "What's that got to do with our——"

"It has a lot to do with my plans. There's no way to send out a message. One of us must go for help."

The men who had leaned forward sank back. The kid was dumb or crazy. It was the captain who voiced the general sentiment.

"Well, that's a hell of a plan! Anybody would run into a ton of lead before he got to the bottom of this hill."

"Anybody in an American uniform would. But not in a German uniform."

The lieutenant-colonel laid a hand on the captain's arm and nodded for Rhinehart to continue.

"There's a man among our captured Bavarians about my size. I'll swap uniforms with him. At the first opportunity I'll slip down and join the German force. I'll be an escaped prisoner."

"You're crazy," scoffed the captain. "They'd spot you in a minute. Don't you think they'd know one of their own men?"

"Maybe they would and maybe they wouldn't. I take the chance. There's one thing in my favor—the Bavarian regiment has gone back to a rest area. If that regiment were still here I couldn't possibly get by. But they have been relieved by Silesians. And maybe I can fool the Silesians when I pose as an escaped Bavarian prisoner."

The captain gave a skeptical grunt. But the ranking officer asked:

"Suppose you did get by—what could you do?"

"Well, as an escaped prisoner from this force of Americans, the Fritzies are going to be interested in what I have to tell. I'll lay it on so strong they'll think we have a small army up here with enough food and ammunition to last a year. They'll think Hill 320 will be about as easy to take as Verdun."

"Go on, Lieutenant."

"When I have told them that the hill is strongly held, they will further delay attack. Then during the first interruption—when they are shelled or moved or anything like that—I'll slip out and try to get back through to our lines."

"Preposterous!" fumed the captain. "You'd

never make it in the world. You'd only get your damn' fool head shot off."

"Maybe. But I'd as soon get it shot off that way as to sit here and have it shot off a few hours later. It's a chance, that's all."

The lieutenant-colonel put in: "We've got to hold on here. That's orders. If we don't get some message through our name's mud. You know the old army saying, 'To do anything is better than do nothing.' The wildest schemes are sometimes best. Just run over your points again, Lieutenant."

For lack of a better plan, Rhinehart's desperate strategy was accepted. It was risking the life of one man to save many more and to hold an important position. The group broke up and the men went to their stations.

During the cold and dripping day there was only spasmodic firing. It gave Rhinehart more time to perfect his plan. First he pumped the fat prisoner Otto for more information about the German Army and the Bavarian regiment of which the had been a unit. Whenever the informant balked he encouraged him with a precious Camel.

Just before dusk two husky doughboys cut out from the little squad of prisoners the private whose

uniform Rhinehart coveted. They walked him away into a clump of bushes where the lieutenant waited. The German's blue eyes became more watery still when he studied the stern and mysterious mien of his captors.

"*Gott in Himmel!*" he cried, "am I to be murdered?"

"We're not going to hurt you," Rhinehart said in German, "we only want your uniform. Take it off. I'm going to swap cooties with you."

"What?" demanded the little prisoner indignantly. "*Me* undress out here in this cold rain. Never! I have weak lungs and it would be the death of me. I refuse."

"All right," Rhinehart spoke in English to the waiting doughboys, "take off his clothes and boots."

The men fell to work with gusto. Firm ungentle hands seized the struggling Fritzie. The damp and steely sky ignored his protests and supplications. In a very short time Rhinehart stood in the low boots and gray uniform of Germany and the outraged prisoner was reluctantly pulling on the discarded olive drab.

"Give him a blanket," Rhinehart directed as he walked away, "we must soften the horrors of war when we can."

As darkness fell the lieutenant-colonel and the captain escorted the converted German soldier to the outermost sentry. Silently they shook hands.

"Hold on till you hear from me," said Rhinehart.

"Good luck," the colonel wished him.

"You are one of God's damn' fools." The captain's parting was gruff but his voice shook as he said it.

Making as little noise as possible Rhinehart slipped down the dark path and knew he was on level ground. His feet felt strange and uncertain in the stiff, mud-caked boots of the prisoner. After he had gone a little way he stopped to get his bearings and to listen.

Far off in the direction of the American lines the dim slow light of a flare stained the sky. Faint flashes to the north and low rumblings told him something big was going on over there. Near by he heard only the steady drip-drip of collected raindrops on the dead leaves.

In this moment of inaction the odds against him presented themselves in merciless array. He had a single chance in a thousand. But, after all, his was only one life. Millions of men as good as he had been battered into the torn soil of France.

No one can escape death. Every one must die once. Rhinehart took a grip upon himself and went with firm steps toward the German lines.

When he reached territory where he expected to encounter sentries he walked with no attempt at concealment. He had decided that was the way an escaped German prisoner would approach his own lines. After what seemed an age the expected challenge came sharply through the darkness. A deep Prussian guttural demanded:

"Halt! Who goes there?"

"*Kamerad*," called Rhinehart and stepped confidently forward.

"Advance and identify yourself."

Rhinehart advanced to where a giant figure loomed in the gloomy drizzle. He gave his story tersely and without the bat of an eyelash. He had been captured by the Americans now holding the hill and had escaped under cover of darkness. Bah! They were not soldiers. They didn't even know how to picket properly.

"Come with me," directed the sentry.

Rhinehart walked ahead through a path in the undergrowth. There were no signs of trenches facing the hill held by the Americans. He judged that the Germans, seeing the enemy was entirely

in hostile territory, had merely thrown a precautionary cordon about the place to be sure the trapped detachment did not escape. The sentry was a taciturn giant, and Rhinehart did not try to make him talk. He knew that safety lay in acting natural, and he was guarding each step with extreme caution.

The corporal of the guard was a small chubby man with thick glasses. Like many small men he gave himself pompous airs. Under different circumstances Rhinehart might have laughed at the ridiculous little figure strutting before him in the big boots and overcoat four sizes too large. At last the boy stood before the *Ober-Lieutenant.*

That personage lounged back in a candle-lighted dugout with girls' photos on the walls. His long legs were crossed on a table beside an opened bottle of beer. His head was close cropped and had a scar running half-way across the top. The man had a long sardonic face on which glistened a monocle. Despite the German's languid air Rhinehart detected a dangerous gleam back of the single lens.

"Well, my fine fellow," the *Ober-Lieutenant* yawned, "give an account of yourself."

Rhinehart had rehearsed this scene before and

when it was over he congratulated himself on having overcome his first great peril. He told how he had been captured in the American drive and after being held a day and night he had slipped through the careless picket line.

"Why did you escape?" the officer shot at him suddenly. "Are you so fond of war, then?"

"It was not that, my Lieutenant. I have a wife and a little baby in Munich. I prefer to live. But I knew our artillery would soon blast out these fool Americans. I did not want to be killed by our guns, so I got away when the chance came."

"Go on," said the officer, settling back and sipping beer.

Rhinehart continued with more confidence. He said that the American force holding the hill consisted of almost a regiment, that they had one-pounders and plenty of machine-guns. Their ammunition was sufficient. While he could not be sure of their supplies, he noted that they did not stint themselves on food and concluded that the "enemy" was not troubled on this score. Furthermore the slopes of the hill and the thick underbrush made the place a stubborn fortification.

"Very interesting," yawned the officer after taking a few notes, "but I must pass you along."

He summoned an orderly and delivered Rhinehart to his keeping.

"Put him under guard," was the parting order. "Turn him over to the intelligence officer to-morrow. He may have information of value."

That was the last Rhinehart saw of the *Ober-Lieutenant*: his legs still sprawled across the candle-lit table, he was pouring another drink of beer. Sloshing along behind the boots of the orderly, the boy thanked the gods that so far he had not failed.

CHAPTER XXVII

Amos Still Has His Feet

The Two Black Crows, bedded down in the French truck, thought that their jolting conveyance was never going to stop. Twice during the day they had been visited by Tonga Bok who brought them hunks of French soldier bread and bottles of wine.

"W-where you taking us, Tonga?" Amos demanded.

Tonga Bok liberated a string of meaningless gutturals and made violent motions with his hands.

"Never wanted to talk African before," said Amos sadly, "but I sho' wish my ancestors had kept up de language."

If Willie and Amos had known more of the war and its recognized precedents they would have been even more concerned about their destination. It was a firm and proved rule with the Germans that whenever you saw Senegalese in the French line an attack was coming. These wild black men from Africa were feared above all the races against which the Germans fought.

The Senegalese were unequal to trench warfare; they could not stand a barrage. They were shock troops only. When they went forward it was in a whirling rush. Savage yells accompanied their onslaught. Each man carried a knife which he plied madly and with skill. They had a pretty habit of collecting as souvenirs the ears of fallen foes.

It was in such a wild outfit that the unsuspecting Amos and Willie were heading for the front at the spanking rate of fifteen kilometers an hour.

They didn't know where they were going, but they were on their way. Coming of a race that loves to ride, they dismissed their doubts and settled in the cushion of gray blankets to get what they could out of the trip. Willie cut a slit in the heavy canvas beside the one out of which Amos was peering. From time to time they commented on such phenomena as were worthy of notice. Amos was puzzled by the condition of the fields.

"Dog-gone," he observed to Willie, "look at all dem round holes in dat pasture. Looks like de ground had a bad case of smallpox. What you reckon makes 'em, Willie?"

"That's de way Frog farmers plow," explained Willie confidently. "Dey're breaking ground for

de fall planting. A special kind of French plow makes dem round holes."

"Dog-gone, looks like you know everything. What's dem funny strings of rusty wire wid three or four lines of posts?"

"Don't you know a bob-wire fence when you see one?" the disgusted Willie countered.

The long train of camions thundered through a village that had a desolate and deserted appearance. Roofs were off buildings and windows were out. Bored French soldiers stood in doorways to watch them pass.

"Where's all the folks live in dat town?" Amos wanted to know.

"They're inside de houses," Willie answered. "Can't expect 'em to stand out on a cold and rainy day like dis to see a few cullud soldiers go by."

"W-what tooken de roofs off so many houses?"

Willie was becoming exasperated.

"Boy," he demanded, "ain't your eyes got no connection with your brain a-tall? Looks like you might figger out a few things for yourself. Ain't you noticed how all trees longside the road is bent and busted? Dat cain't mean but one thing—they've had a big wind. Dat's what hurt de houses and broke down de trees."

"Boy, dey sho' must have had a mean spell of weather," muttered Amos, as he noted a passing forest in which almost every tree was smashed and broken.

Their camion stopped for a moment, the long train being halted by a traffic jam somewhere forward. In the gathering dusk far off and to the right full flashes blazed against the sky. They were accompanied by an ominous rumble.

"Dog-gone," said Amos, "I guess you're right about de storm. I see lightning and hear thunder off dat away. But I never knowed it to thunder and lightning back home when it was cold as it is here now."

Willie turned to his friend a face that indicated the owner was pained by fool questions and comments.

"Amos," he observed sadly, "I knew you was igerunt but I didn't know how igerunt you was. Way you talk anybody would think de weather in France was de same as down in Tennessee."

"Why ain't it?"

"Cose it ain't. Over here it's liable to thunder and lightning right in de middle of a winter blizzard."

"W-what causes dat?"

"It's caused by de zodiac."

Amos laughed sheepishly. "Dog-gone, I don't know what's de matter wid me! How'd I come to disremember 'bout the zodiac! Cose any fool would know de old zodiac was to blame."

On they traveled in the falling darkness. The flashes and rumbling continued.

"Boy," Amos said finally, "sho' looks like we're ketching up wid dat thunder and lightning."

"Behave," scoffed Willie, "light looks close, 'cause it's getting darker."

Again Amos subsided before the brilliance of his small friend.

They came to another wrecked town which swarmed with soldiers and trucks. But after two blockades they were again on the open road hitting up their former steady gait. It seemed to Amos that they were taking an awful chance driving in the night without any lights. He even considered crawling forward on the load and calling the driver's attention to his oversight, but he happened to remember that he could not handle the language.

It must have been well toward morning when the caravan stopped. The two stowaways woke from a light slumber to gaze hastily out the back of their truck. Except for the flashes of light,

everything was as dark as a stack of black cats. Amos raised his voice:

"Tonga Bok. Oh, Tonga!" he bellowed. "Where at is you?"

There was no reply, but a hand that felt as if it was made of steel wire closed about his gullet and made a repetition of the sound impossible. A flash showed that Tonga Bok was on the other end of the hand and that his free forefinger was laid over his thick lips in an unmistakable demand for quiet.

Willie whispered, "Where we going, Tonga, and what we going to do?"

The Senegalese guessed the inquiry. He explained in his native tongue that they were going into the battle-line and that as soon as a couple of their number fell he would get rifles with long bayonets to complete the disguise of Amos and Willie. But the words did not mean a thing and left his American friends as puzzled as ever.

Accompanied by Tonga they fell into a long dark file that marched down the road and cut off into a rutted lane. Once Tonga pointed toward the flashes.

"*Américain, Américain,*" he said.

"He says 'Americans,'" explained Willie. "I must be learning his language." He pointed in the

direction the Senegalese had indicated. "You mean Americans is over there?" he asked.

"*Oui, oui, oui!*" Tonga grinned showing a fine display of African ivory through the darkness.

From the side road they went into a field, from the field into a wood, and at the border of the wood they stepped down. The walking became very slow and slushy. Amos put out a hand on each side and encountered clammy earth.

"Why, dog-gone, Willie," said he, "we're walking in a ditch."

"Dat's right," admitted Willie, "and look at dem boys over dere digging. Guess dey're bringing us out here to do some ditching. Funny dey don't work in de daytime."

"Probably working day and night shifts," Amos suggested.

They passed communicating ditches where Senegalese shadows with long bayonets on their rifles stopped the unarmed pair and asked questions. But always Tonga Bok was able to answer satisfactorily.

The trench became crookeder, deeper, wetter. Amos was about to sit down and announce that his feet would carry him no farther when the column stopped. Whispered orders ran down the

line of Senegalese before and behind. The men settled in the trench, leaning their guns against the damp walls. Apparently they had found their destination.

Out in the dripping darkness in front of them something went put-put-put-put. It stopped. Then the put-put was repeated. Amos stuck out a curious head. All he could see were irregular rows of pale objects that looked like white stumps. They were about as high as his waist.

"Willie," he said, "you know so much—what's dat put-put noise?"

"Why, dat's de French whiffit bird. Lots of 'em around heah."

"Yeah? Well, what's dat zipping noise up above our heads sound like bees buzzing by?"

Willie stuck his neck out and listened.

"Dat's what it is. Bees. Dese heah crazy Frog bees work day and night, rain or shine."

He might have got by with that one had not something struck his French helmet with such force that it knocked it off and left its owner somewhat dizzy. By groping he retrieved the iron hat and managed to stand upright again.

"Hot dog!" Willie exclaimed, "dem bees sho' got velocity! I'd hate to have one of 'em sting me."

"Sting you!" repeated Amos in an awful voice. "Boy, you said a mouthful. Brace yourself. I got some mighty bad news. Here's what it was hit you."

In the darkness he passed Willie a wet cylindrical bit of metal that was flattened at one end. It felt as if it had just been taken off a hot stove.

"W-what i-is it?" chattered Willie.

"Boy, dat's a bullet. Tonga Bok done brung us smack up into de front-line ditch. We're in a battle-field up to our necks. And dem's Germans shootin' at us over where dat put-putting is."

Willie tried to control his feelings but the news was too much. He let out a long despairing wail. There were restless movements, subtropical curses on each side. But Amos had one hand over his friend's mouth, and the other under his sagging shoulder.

"Bear up, boy," he hissed, "I'm gonna need all de hands an' feet I got in a minute."

As if in answer to Willie's cry, a Fourth-of-July rocket climbed into the dripping sky from the German trenches. The flare descended slowly, revealing the shattered landscape in a weird white light.

And in this uncanny illumination the two made a second awful discovery. Outside the trench just

in front of Willie a skull and cross-bones carved in marble leered down at him. Beyond, a stone angel was poised, its wings spread in unmistakable symbolism. An acre of upright stones verified their worst suspicions.

"W-willie!" gasped Amos.

"Yes," came the faint answer.

"We—we're in a graveyard! Dey's corpses all around us!"

"Yes," still more faintly.

"Boy, I still got my feet. I put 'em in use right now. Is you wid me?"

"Man, I'm ahead of you!"

The black trench in both directions was choked with chattering Senegalese. Outside the traveling would be better. Willie cleared the topmost sandbags at one bound. He ducked under two strands of barbed wire leaving behind a section of pants seat. As he straightened into his stride a dark shadow whizzed past. Another flare went up and he recognized Amos. Despite the mud, shell-holes and wire Amos was practically floating through the astonished air. His feet touched the ground now and then just as a matter of form.

One thought ran through Amos' buzzing head.

"The Americans! Where the light is!"

With eyes on the distant flashes, he continued his flight. Over on the right that put-put noise was going again. The German bees sang all around him. Behind he heard noises that meant Willie was following. Both sprawled into mud-holes but were up instantly.

Presently they had to hurdle more wire. Then Amos tumbled into a ditch where strong arms embraced him. Farther down a scrambling noise and a groan told him that Willie's flight had come to a similar period.

They had run smack into the welcoming bosom of the German Army.

CHAPTER XXVIII

Two Pore Cullud Boys

By their uncanny spy system, the Germans in the trenches knew that Senegalese had gone in opposite. The knowledge put them on edge. There was that tried and proved adage: "When they throw in Senegalese, watch for an attack."

A flare had been the German answer to Willie's yell of fright. Lookouts on the fire steps roused sleeping officers. Presently they made out two black men charging at them through the rain. A sharpshooter drew down on the foremost. Amos never knew it, but at that moment he was so close to the pearly gates he could have reached out and touched the hinges. He was saved by a lieutenant who struck up the gun as the bullet left the barrel.

"Swine!" he snarled at the soldier, "don't you see they are not armed. Probably deserters. Let 'em come. You soldiers never get it through your thick skulls that a prisoner is worth ten dead men. We'll wring them for information."

A delusion, but it saved the lives of the flying Black Crows.

Once in the German trench it did not take Amos and Willie long to recapture their self-control. Several factors contributed. The first was the almost tender solicitude shown toward the prisoners by the officer who had saved them. Willie was wheezing considerably and a soldier had to give him a blanket. The apparent injustice was smoothed over by the remark:

"For the Fatherland. It is most important that the prisoner be protected."

Another thing that reassured Amos and Willie was the fact that they were again among white folk. They had never had a definite idea of the color of Germans. Now that they saw them close up and discovered they were a fair race, confidence returned. You never know what sort of a trick a black man may play you; Tonga Bok brought them straight to where the bullets were! White folk were not like that. They recognized obligations to the colored race. Most of the time you could depend on them to take good care of you.

The German officer continued his solicitude. After seeing that they were not wounded, he turned them over to a sergeant who rushed them back to a reserve trench. There they spent the night in a comfortable bunk of a dugout while their guard

had to watch them in the cold rain outside. As soon as the gray morning arrived they were wakened. Breakfast consisted of bread twice as black and tough as that of the Senegalese but there was something in a tin that smoked invitingly.

"Thank you, Cap'n," Amos said, "the bread ain't very good, but dat hot coffee sho' looks noble."

Even Willie had begun to revive. He raised his tin cup toward Amos and pledged him:

"Here's hoping dey don't shoot us."

Amos took one swig and he was through. The synthetic coffee blistered his tonsils and insulted his stomach. In as far as Amos could guess it was brewed from a combination of quinine and soft coal soot, mixed in equal proportions.

After they had put away as much bread and water as they could manage, their guard started with them. They followed a path through hilly thickets and forests. At one place they saw bearded men sitting and eating around huge camouflaged guns. The world was alive with the gray uniforms of the enemy. It seemed a long time before they arrived at a considerable clearing along which were rows of dugouts and huts with concrete roofs under coverings of logs and earth. The road beyond connected with the outside world, for couriers

were arriving and departing on motorcycles, and funny-looking automobiles stood about.

This was the P. C. to which they were destined. And they were consigned to the intelligence officer.

Amos and Willie were still arrayed in the French helmets and overcoats given them by the overhelpful Tonga Bok. French uniforms were of various colors. The men who searched their pockets saw nothing curious in the olive drab beneath the overcoats. Most of their buttons were encrusted with mud. Since their pockets had been thoroughly cleaned out in the village far behind them, they had nothing there to indicate an American origin. Their faces were without question a virgin and undiluted black. It is only natural therefore that the intelligence officer considered them French soldiers. And it was for that reason a linguist expert in French and African was assigned to question them.

He was a little old man with gray whiskers and spectacles who had come into the ranks from Leipzig University. He had specialized in Senegalese. So proud was he of his accomplishments that his brother officers were always hanging about when he put prisoners through an examination, hoping his knowledge would fail. A little group of them

listened now in the dimly lighted underground room.

The professor adjusted his glasses, gave his mustache an upward push, got out on the extreme edge of his crude chair and smiled at Amos and Willie—a smile meant to encourage confidences.

"Parley voo Frawn-say?" he inquired sweetly.

Amos and Willie looked questioningly at each other.

"What's de white gentleman say?" Amos wondered.

"Say, 'Polly jump over de fence to-day.' "

"Aw dat don't make no sense."

The little German was looking at them with his head cocked on one side. He adjusted his glasses and smoothed his whiskers. It was evident that the prisoners had not understood him. A twitter of amusement ran through the group behind him.

The little professor cleared his throat. "Ah," he said, "it is plain these men have learned no French. I shall have to talk to them in Senegalese."

He turned loose a string of flawless African which left the prisoners more puzzled than ever. The twitter behind the officer became more pronounced. A flush spread over his face as he tried another burst of Senegalese.

"Dog-gone," said the mystified Amos, "I—I think de white gentleman got a bone stuck in his throat."

The little professor listened to these syllables with his ear cocked for every inflection.

"Ah," he cried triumphantly, "I recognize it now. It is a Gold Coast dialect. I am proficient in that also."

But Amos and Willie were just as hopelessly puzzled by the Gold Coast language. Followed Zulu, Congo, Somali, Moroccan and fifteen other African dialects. Amos and Willie muffed them all in rapid succession. At last the baffled interpreter had to admit his defeat. Amid the delighted guffaws of his comrades he got up, sputtering like wet fire-crackers.

"I shall have to call in Major Lohman," he said hastily. "It is evident that these men are from a Tanganyika district. He alone can talk to them."

Amos and Willie had a respite of five hours while a courier hurried off to fetch the major. When they were summoned again a tall, cadaverous, stooping man confronted them. In a sad voice he intoned a string of Tanganyika.

"Dog-gone," said Amos hopelessly, "dass jes' as bad as de rest."

At these words Herr Lohman threw his arms wide and a great light shone in his face. A long arm reached forth and broke the incrusted earth off one of Willie's buttons. The embossed eagle underneath confirmed the officer's suspicion.

"Professor," said he turning to his baffled comrade, "do you speak English?"

"English?" repeated the whiskered one furiously. "I was exchange professor at Harvard for five years!"

"That explains everything. If you'd been at Vanderbilt University you might have understood what these men were saying. They are American negroes and they speak English. But it is not the kind of English used at Harvard."

The gale that followed this was too much for the defeated interpreter. He took his whiskers hastily away, and the questioning of Amos and Willie continued without him.

Major Lohman started out by assuring the prisoners that it would go well with them if they told everything. It would get them better treatment in prison camp; and if they proved stubborn there were—ah, methods to make the unwilling loquacious.

"Do you agree to answer all I ask you?"

"Yassir, Cap'n," Amos agreed, "I ain't got nothing to hide."

"Me neither," acquiesced Willie.

"Excellent," said the German, and he rubbed his bony hands together.

The officer took Amos first and then Willie. His question brought out a tale interesting to hear but of absolutely no use to the German General Staff. The prisoners were Pioneer troops, stationed far back. On leave they had too many drinks and got into trouble. Their rescuer was an African gentleman named Tonga Bok. With the idea that he was doing them a favor he had taken them into the front-line with his outfit. When they discovered the awful truth they started hastily in the direction of the American force and had stumbled into the German trench.

That was all they could tell. Several repetitions failed to shake the main points of the narrative. The major wrote down notes, made a grimace of dissatisfaction and summoned the guard.

"Take the prisoners away," he said, "they don't know what it's all about."

Amos and Willie stepped outside. Two men in German uniforms were coming toward the dugout they had left. One had a gun and wore the German

steel helmet. The other was unarmed and had on his head a round cap with no bill.

The black prisoners were walking ahead of their guard. They followed a narrow board walk. In stepping aside to make way for the two men approaching, Amos took a good look at the one in front. Before the guard could interfere, the black soldier gave a cry of welcome and was wringing the man's hand.

"Why, Mister Rhinehart!" he cried, pumping a reluctant arm up and down.

Willie had echoed the cry and was pumping the other hand. "Mister Steve," he yelped, "how is you? What you doing here in German clothes? Man, we sho' is glad to see you. Is you in the German Army?"

Rhinehart did not share the joy of the greeting. He gave both a furious look that was meant to stop their demonstration. It didn't. At last he jerked his hands away from the clinging black ones and said in English:

"Shut up, you two. I never saw you before in my life."

"Aw, man," pleaded Amos, "don't joke wid us now. We're in trouble and we need white folk friends. We been tooken prisoner."

Rhinehart could have assured them that he was in more trouble than they, but he didn't risk any more English. Instead he spoke to his guard in German.

"These two men have made a mistake. They think they have seen me somewhere. It is probably a case of resemblance."

"*Ja?*" was the skeptical answer.

The guard came to attention as another voice broke in. It was the cadaverous Major Lohman who had overseen the incident from the door of his dugout. To Rhinehart's guard he said:

"Keep this man outside till I send for him." And to the Crows' attendant, "Bring those black men back in here."

Two very puzzled prisoners faced the major across the gloomy little room. He glared at them a moment with his black brows drawn together and his eyes narrowed to slits.

"Did you think you could make a fool of me?" he demanded through his teeth.

A fist as hard as a wooden mallet crashed full into Amos' face. The room reeled. He went down. Before he could recover his feet there was a second blow and Willie sprawled beside him. The furious major stood over them ready to give them more.

"Are you going to tell me the truth or not?" he asked threateningly.

"Yessir, Cap'n!" Their compliance was fervent and emphatic.

"Good. Now then—that man outside, you have seen him before?" he demanded of Amos.

"Seen him before! Law, Mister Boche, he comes from our home town. Down in Buford, Tennessee."

"Tell me all you know about him—and don't call me Mister Boche."

"Yessir, Cap'n. Well, sir, dat's one of de finest whitest boys you ever saw in your life. He worked at the railroad deepo. Everybody liked him. One little gal specially was just crazy 'bout him."

"So? And is he a German?"

"Aw, white folk, stop your fooling! Dat boy ain't no more German dan me and Willie. He's American like us."

"What do you suppose he's doing in a German uniform?"

"Couldn't tell you dat, Boss. But he's a pretty smart white boy, and if I was you-all I'd watch out for him. He might be up to some trick."

"We'll keep an eye on him all right," was the grim answer.

Amos and Willie were dismissed, and Steve Rhinehart stood before the lank inquisitor. The officer lighted a synthetic cigarette and let the acrid vapor curl upward before he began in English.

"Well," he said in a voice of steel, "your game's up. I have identified you beyond doubt as an American. You know the penalty of appearing within our lines wearing a German uniform. It is death. You might as well make a clean breast of everything."

Rhinehart was sure his black friends had sealed his doom, but he kept his nerve. He answered the major's English in German.

"Sir," he protested, "I can not understand what you said. I speak only German."

He had made up his story and he was going to stick to it. In steady tones he declared that he was a member of the Bavarian regiment that had been but recently in the front line; that he had been captured by the Americans in their drive on Hill 320; that he had slipped through their picket-lines and escaped. Cross-examination failed to shake him. He was firm before every cunning trap of their third degree.

"All right," the major finally rose, "I give you credit for bravery. But that will not save you. It

will be easy to check your story. You gain time but the result is the same. In the end, you will be shot."

That night, after a supper of hot water flavored with cabbage and gritty bread, Rhinehart was locked in a concrete room. As his eyes became accustomed to the gloom, he made out two pairs of white spots in one corner. A movement in that direction told him the spots were eyes and that he had cellmates.

"Who are you?" he demanded in a low tone.

" 'Tain't nobody but us. Amos and Willie."

Rhinehart knew, then, why he had been put with these two. Through an opening somewhere, they were being watched and their conversation would be taken down. He gave himself up for lost for his question in English was a confession. At any rate he could relieve his feelings.

"Do you know what you two are?" he demanded in an acid whisper.

"We just a couple of pore Tennessee cullud boys," Amos ventured.

"You are the finest pair of damned fools that ever walked the earth. From the neck up you are solid ivory. Of all the blankety-blank——"

The rest of his catalogue of their shortcomings

would not do in print. When he stopped for breath and new insults, Amos spoke up.

"Mister Rhinehart," he said, "how come me and Willie is such bad names? We always been your friend. Didn't we chuck you on dat train and get you out of Buford when you might have been hurt?"

"There was another proof of what I'm saying. If that wasn't the——" And he went off into another display of verbal fireworks.

"Listen, Mister Rhinehart," Amos was able to say at last, "what is we done? How come you lambaste us wid such hard names?"

Rhinehart's anger was burning out. "Oh, I don't suppose it made any difference, but when you recognized me this afternoon you finished me."

"W-we what?"

"I'm an officer in the American Army. I have been caught in the German lines wearing a German uniform. That makes me guilty of espionage. I will be—shot."

Amos and Willie were stunned. The former was first to gain his voice.

"Aw, man, dat's bad! We done dat to you! Just 'cause we was your friend and was glad to see you. Dat give you away and now dey gonna shoot you."

"Yes."

"Boy, dat's awful," groaned Amos.

Willie was speechless.

"Well, forget it," Rhinehart said. He was mollified by their evident distress. After all, his hope had been a dim one. If he hadn't been tripped by Amos and Willie, a hundred other pitfalls might have caught him.

"We done dat to you and we're your friends," Amos repeated. "Well, we ain't daid yet. None of us. If any chance comes, me and Willie gonna get you loose. Ain't we, Willie?"

"Sho' is." Willie's voice was heavy with feeling.

"Well, forget it," repeated Rhinehart. "Let's talk about the old town. You're the first men I have seen from there since—the night you saw me out of the city. I joined the American Army. How was—everybody in Buford when you left?" His voice shook a little.

"She was fine," Amos replied. "Last one I saw down at de train when we left was Miss Mary Jane. And she gave me a letter for you."

"Where is it?" the boy demanded eagerly.

"We got into a little ruction back in Frog territory. Dey took all our money and de letter too.

We ran foul of dat mean man, Davis. He was de one tooken the letter and all de money we had. You remember him, don't you?"

"I'll say I remember him!"

"Well, after he tooken the letter he tore it open and read it. And den he ripped it into little bitty pieces and throwed it away. Maybe he didn't like what 'twas de letter said."

"That's some comfort," Rhinehart murmured.

He was silent for a moment. Then he said in a low voice, "Amos, I—may not see her again. I want you an' Willie to take her a message."

They managed to say, "Yessir," in spite of the lumps in their throats.

"Tell her that she was my girl; that I loved her from the moment I first saw her and that my last thought was of her; and that she must not make the rest of her life unhappy over anything that happens to me."

Another silence.

"I would like to send her something—something of mine she could keep. But the Germans took everything when they searched me. All I have is this: Where is your hand, Amos?" He laid something small and round in the palm that sought him in the darkness. "It's a button from my coat.

The one nearest my heart. It's a German button. You must tell her that I was in this uniform because I hoped to save American lives by wearing it."

The mercy of sleep finally enveloped them, Rhinehart dropped off first. Amos and Willie saw that he was covered from the cold. Then they renewed their oath to do everything possible to rescue their friend from the danger into which they had unwittingly thrown him.

CHAPTER XXIX

The Big Peerade

Before daybreak the three prisoners were aroused and given an alleged breakfast. They choked down a little food and managed some of the acorn coffee for the benefit of its scalding warmth. As soon as they were through, two guards took them out of their cell and started off with them.

The drizzle had stopped but it had been followed by colder weather. Rhinehart judged that they were being taken back to some prison concentration point. There but one thing could be awaiting him. As soon as investigation showed he was not of the Bavarian regiment as he claimed, he would be shot as an American spy. Now that it was all over he felt strangely uninterested in his own fate. What worried him was the trapped band of Americans back on Hill 320 whom he had hoped to save.

One guard sloshed ahead, Rhinehart came next, Amos and Willie followed, the second guard brought up the rear. Amos was still tortured by the harm he had unconsciously done his friend.

"Mister Rhinehart," he began, "I sho' is——"

There was the sound of a thud and Amos protested to the guard in the rear, "White boy, quit punching me wid dat rifle."

In German the guard said to Rhinehart, "Inform these black men that you are not allowed to talk."

"They won't let us talk, Amos," Rhinehart explained.

"Sho' is nice white folks!" Amos complained to himself.

Slosh, slosh, slosh. They went along through the raw darkness of early morning.

When they started out everything was as still as death. You would have thought the war was a thousand miles away. But before they had been gone half an hour things began to happen. There was a rumble that increased into a roar and ended in a flash and explosion that made the earth tremble. The big shell was followed by a second and a third.

"One of them freight trains liable to hit us," complained Willie.

And disregarding the orders for silence Amos asked, "Why don't dey stop us under a tree or something?"

The guards quickened the pace but showed no signs of halting. It was with elation that Rhine-

hart heard the American shells burst. In spite of the danger, the dropping of these explosives was like a message from his friends.

The forward guard was visibly nervous. He even deigned to speak to the captive, "What do you suppose it means?" he asked.

"Can't tell yet," Rhinehart responded. "Maybe only some big gun crew got cold and needs exercise. Wait for the smaller stuff. If they open with that, it is a barrage and an attack."

As if to answer their questions the intermittent lights flashing from the American artillery became a continuous flicker. It was accompanied by a steady throb of sound. Drum fire! It was a general barrage and no fooling. Another American drive was on. Shells began falling closer about them. The guards shouted and the little column broke into a run.

"Oh, Mister Guard," prayed Amos, "lemme git in front."

"Call that running?" panted Willie.

By the flash of explosions they saw a shattered little village ahead. They made for its doubtful shelter. Shell fragments were whining about their ears.

As they dived into the cellar of the first ruined

building, an eight-inch shell arrived. It exploded just outside with a blinding crash that seemed to shake their very "innards" loose. Instead of protecting them, the wall above toppled in, covering the five men with stones and beams.

Amos was dazed, but he was the first to regain his senses. In the pale half-light of approaching dawn he made out the motionless forms of the other four. Just then one of them stirred. It was a German guard. His helmet had fallen off baring a closely cropped head. By an effort he brought himself to a sitting posture and looked dazedly about. Finally his gaze focused on Amos. The light of returning consciousness came into his eyes.

He remembered now. These two black men and the white one were prisoners. He was responsible for them. From a mound of stone and dust his rifle butt protruded.

But Amos was ahead of him. He found a twisted strand of wire in the debris. Before the dazed German could regain his feet Amos had him down and was kneeling on his back. Drawing his wrists together, Amos bound and tied them none too gently with the wire.

The German began to roll and kick. He bellowed like an enraged bull.

"If you're gonna ack like dat!" said Amos.

His searching eyes found a dirty rag of sacking and a length of cord. The German had his mouth open for another blast but it never came out. Amos rammed the gritty rag into the opening and bound it tight.

"Now, yell all you wanta," the victor invited.

Hastily Amos dug Rhinehart and Willie from under the twisted timbers and heaped masonry. A pool of water that had collected in the cellar helped him bring them to. They were only stunned, but Rhinehart was bleeding from a cut over his eye.

The liberated prisoners now turned their attention to the second guard. There was no need to worry about him. He had been killed outright by the falling wall.

The bound guard was still threshing about, making choked sounds from behind his gag. To put him beyond any possibility of interference they tied his feet together.

"Dey ain't gonna shoot you now, Mister Rhinehart." Amos' relief showed in his voice.

"Well, not unless they catch us again."

His mind was working swiftly and he assumed immediate command of the situation. Reaching down, he took one of the fallen German helmets and

put it on. Then he dug out a rifle. He was still wearing his German disguise and to all appearances was of the Kaiser's infantry.

"Here's our plan," he said speaking rapidly, "you march along in front of me. If we're stopped I'm taking you as prisoners to the rear. If they wonder why I'm headed for American territory I'll tell 'em we lost our bearings. Get going, you Two Black Crows."

"March step," said Willie, crawling out into the road.

"March step nothing!" answered Amos. "We take it at the double-quick."

They had an excellent marker for their direction. The flashes of gun-fire were in their faces. Shells were still grumbling and bursting as they pressed rapidly forward. Again and again they passed detachments of Boche machine-gunners and infantrymen. But no one bothered them. With a general attack to be repulsed, who was going to waste time on a single guard with a pair of black prisoners?

At times the American barrage became so intense that they had to lie in ditches beside the road. Planes roared and wheeled overhead. They pressed on. After an age they could hear the big

stuff going over to blast crossroads and rail lines far behind. The running bursts of shrapnel and high explosives marked what had been the German trenches. At last the fugitives were at the fringe of the explosions. Trenches near by were filled with dead or hidden Boche. They could even make out torn and broken wire.

"Lie low," Rhinehart said as he led them to a shell crater. "When the artillery lets up, our attack is coming."

"Yes, s-sir!" chattered Amos and Willie. It had been a long time since they had prayed, but they made up for it now.

"Meanwhile," continued Rhinehart, "I'll change the formation. From here on, I must pretend to be a Boche prisoner. And you two will be my guards."

Finally the barrage ceased. Machine-guns chattered in all directions. There was the personal and individual spit of rifle fire. Grenades exploded dully in trenches. Much yelling and cursing. Then the firing died to sporadic bursts and a semblance of peace descended upon the wounded earth.

"All right," said Rhinehart, "the worst is over. Let's get going. Remember I'm a German prisoner and you're bringing me to the American lines."

"Yassir," said two shaken and muddy objects that had been Amos and Willie.

Things were quiet around them. They lit out up the shell-torn road. Rhinehart marched ahead in his German uniform, Amos and Willie followed with guns they had picked up. They had gone half a mile when the crunch of feet behind made Amos turn.

"Oh, lawd, look behind us," he groaned.

The other two looked. A detachment of Germans was following them.

"Faster, Willie," hissed Amos.

Willie doubled the beat. The Germans increased their speed in proportion.

Willie paced his trio with a fast trot. It was not too fast for the Germans following. Willie broke into a lope and the Germans did the same.

"Look at 'em now," gasped Amos, "dey's twice as many as before."

Rhinehart and Willie verified the statement. Even as they turned, fresh squads of Fritzies debouched from the woods. Rhinehart wondered why they didn't start shooting. Then he realized what had happened. The Heinies carried their kits but they didn't have guns.

He sat down beside the shell-torn road and

rocked with laughter. Amos and Willie paused and wondered. They kept one eye turned on the Germans who had paused too.

"It's all right," Rhinehart was finally able to explain, "these Bochies don't want to hurt us. They've thrown away their guns. They want to surrender. Only reason they're following is they think we can take 'em to the American lines without getting 'em shot."

Amos surveyed the still growing detachment of Heinies who stood off at a respectful distance.

"*Kamerad!*" quavered a spectacled German lieutenant at the head of the column.

"Come on here, white boys," Amos motioned to them. "Willie, you get in behind and see we don't lose none of our peerade. Is you ready? All right, forward, march."

At the head of forty-six docile German prisoners, Private Amos Crow, of Buford, Tennessee, made his grand reentry into the American Army.

CHAPTER XXX

Plumb de Tears

Rhinehart inquired his way to the nearest regimental P. C. Here he changed his embarrassing German costume for one of his own army. He was greatly relieved to learn here that the little band which he left on Hill 320 had been rescued by the new American drive. Their holding of this rise had aided materially in rolling back the enemy line.

When he rejoined his outfit he was shown an order which told every one to be on the lookout for two black soldiers. They were wanted by both the American and French commanders. A report had been turned in that they had captured and brought in forty-six German prisoners. The generals wished to show their appreciation by decorating the heroes.

Rhinehart made every effort in his power to find Amos and Willie. He wanted them to receive the decorations, and he wanted to thank them on his own account. They had spilled the beans when they gave him away to the German intelligence officer,

but they had retrieved themselves by making his escape possible.

Amos and Willie had vanished from the zone of advance. After their nerve-wracking experience in and around the front they lost all taste for that neighborhood. They yearned for the comparative quiet of their old cow shed in the village of St. Jean. This yearning was translated into action. Setting a hopeful course by the sun, they hit the back trail.

"Boy," said Willie, as they plodded down the road, "you know we been reported. They'll slap a court marshal on when we git back?"

"Well, who cares 'bout dat?" demanded Amos. "I'd rather be court marshalled back where it's ca'm and peaceful dan to be wined and dined up here 'mongst de bullets."

They soon discovered that a difficult Odyssey lay before them. It was easy for wandering stragglers to advance toward the front; but it was something else for stragglers to advance toward the rear. The M. P.'s went on a theory that a man headed toward the front was a legitimate soldier trying to join a detachment in the battle-line. All such men could be used. But soldiers headed for the rear without orders or identification were objects of suspicion.

The result was that Amos and Willie saw the interiors of so many guard-houses they lost count of the number. They would be held, interrogated, and after a time released. In some of the army jails the chow was passable. They would have liked to tarry therein and rest. But hard and heartless military law forced them to the road again.

"We can't board you, boys," one M. P. explained. "On your way and good luck."

Amos put to him the question that he had asked a thousand times: Had the gentleman any idea where they might find the Third Pioneer Battalion?

"Never heard of it," the M. P. answered. "Where is it quartered?"

"At San Jawn."

"What St. Jean?"

"Jes' San Jawn, dass all."

"Soldier, you're hunting for a needle in a haystack. There are about a hundred St. Jeans in France. *Bon jour.*"

They hiked when they had to, they rode when some charitable truck-driver gave them a lift, they ate when they could beg into a chow-line, which was much too seldom. Amos' feet—reluctant to start with—got into a condition passing belief. Even Willie's dogs became swollen and fretful.

Time after time they mounted a rise in the road to look down on an inviting little French village.

"Dere she is!" Willie would shout. "Old San Jawn at last. We'll find our boys down dere."

"Yeah?" Amos would retort. "How you know it's San Jawn?"

"Why, there's the church steeple; and de cote-house square and de barns wid manure piles."

After the twentieth disappointment Amos groaned, "Boy, ain't you found out yet dat all Frog towns is alike? Dey all got churches, cote-house squares, and barns wid manure piles."

The two had about decided they would have to settle down and become Frog citizens. They felt sure they had been over France without finding their outfit; and no white regiment could accept the wanderers into its ranks. Just as hope had disappeared they stumbled on the little village they sought.

From afar they saw what looked like a black soldier sitting beside a wall with a book in his hand. Forgetful of their feet they broke into a run. Their highest hopes were realized. The soldier was their old friend, the red-haired and devout Doremus. He was perusing the Good Book.

Amos and Willie yelled and whooped with delight. They slapped Doremus on the back, they

shook his hand, they tried to tell all the strange and awful things that had befallen them. But Doremus was trying to pull them into a doorway and make them listen to him.

"Pipe down," they heard him say at last, "you two boys won't be so peart when you know what dey gonna do to you. You been A. W. O. L. so long, old captain got something awful stored up and waiting. If I was you I'd beat it. I'd go back de way I come."

Amos laughed wildly. "Boy," he said, "we done walked our laigs down to stumps looking for de old outfit. No matter what happens we're back to stay."

"Cap'n'll probably have you shot."

"Yeah? Well, if he'll feed me once, den let me take off my shoes and put my feet in a tub of cool water, he can shoot me wid one of dese eighteen-inch guns."

"Me too," echoed Willie.

The news of their return spread swiftly. An awed and sympathetic crowd greeted them as they made their way to company headquarters. The orderly reported their presence to Captain Dolan. That stern soldier was prepared to treat them to some special profanity before dishing them up for

a court martial. But the two ragged scarecrows who appeared before him were so forlorn he didn't have the heart to begin.

"Well," he demanded, "have you two got tired seeing the world?"

"Yassir, Cap'n," said Amos, "the prodigals done come home."

The officer looked over a typewritten record. "You have been reported as drunk and disorderly by the mess sergeant. And on top of that you've been A. W. O. L. for over three weeks."

"Yassir, Cap'n."

"Well, where in hell have you been and what in hell happened to you?"

"Well, sir, Cap'n, it was like dis——"

And Amos told his story. He toned down the details of their party with the mess sergeant. Subsequent adventures he detailed with considerable accuracy and the story of their wandering was related with all its yearnings and disappointments.

When they finished the captain's desire to have them shot had disappeared. But duty is duty. A court martial followed. The verdict was prompt and heavy. It was decreed the two must forfeit three months' pay and spend two months in the guard-house.

"Yassir, thank you, sir," Amos said to the officer who read the judgment. His gratitude was genuine, for he had expected something much worse.

The life in the guard-house turned out to be not unpleasant. He did not have to peel potatoes. There was much time to lie around and attend to one's cooties. Together he and Willie planned ways of routing the cunning detachments which found the spot high up between the shoulders where fingers can not reach. Also there is something infinitely delightful in scratching a place that itches. The two had no money, but one of the guards lent them a pair of dice, and Amos was able to rehearse for future use the science Doremus had taught him.

While they were luxuriating thus, the Armistice was declared, leaving as a ruin the best little war that ever happened. Amos and Willie joined in the general rejoicing.

"No more soldiering!" was the general opinion.

The Third Battalion was about to throw its rifles away and head straight for the boats. But a great shock awaited them. The war was over, but the work wasn't.

For a time the labors of the prisoners continued to be light. It meant dragging themselves about the building a few times each day to pick up cigarette

butts and papers. There was plenty of time to sleep. The chow was as good as the other soldiers had.

But one day there came a visitor who brought pangs of apprehension. He drove up in a Ford truck and before the barbed-wire gate of the stockade he unloaded a most discouraging cargo of picks and shovels.

"Man that sho' looks bad," Willie observed.

"Our luck is weakening again," Amos answered. "I hate de sight of dem labor instruments. Come on round heah on de other side of de house; I'd rather not look at 'em."

Next day their worst fears were fulfilled. Guards routed them out of their leisure and marched them to a section of road some ten kilometers out. They were issued picks and shovels and told to get to work. The rest of the outfit was there too. Armed with the lowly weapons of labor, the Third Battalion of Pioneer Infantry strung out along the road and began reluctantly to heal the pits and abrasions caused thereon by years of war traffic.

With one eye cocked in the direction of the guard Willie made a languid peck with his pick at a small bunion in the road-bed.

"Amos," he said, " 'member dat recrooting sergeant? The one got us into de army?"

"H-how could I ever forget?" demanded Amos tossing three small pebbles from one place to another.

"He said we wouldn't have to fight—and we been clear through de German Army. He said we wouldn't have to do no work—and now look at us."

"I would rather not hear any more about it," drawled Amos, "I really would not."

"Soldiering on the job" is an expression denoting extreme labor inefficiency. It was invented by some unfortunate who was trying to get things accomplished with soldier workmen. White troops are not distinguished for any ardor in this respect, but you never have seen intelligent and skilful loafing until you have seen colored labor troops in action. There is one category still less effective, and that is colored soldiers whose pay has been shut off and who are working out a sentence.

Take Amos as a brilliant example. His routine was as follows:

With shovel handle leaning on shoulder, straightens up and looks about.

Spits on hands and rubs hands together for several minutes.

Drops shovel. Has to pick it up and go through above formula again.

Has just about decided he can't put off making a move any longer when sees military car approaching.

Comes to attention and salutes car until it is past.

Spits on hands and rubs them together again when he has to pause and salute another passing car.

Looks around and sees officer coming. Takes up teaspoonful of gravel, walks ten feet away and deposits gravel as if afraid it will explode.

Another car approaches. Stands at attention and salutes.

This lack of enthusiasm was marked by a visiting major who didn't know the southern darky. A group of the soldiers was singing slowly and in chorus:

> "Gwine take Sal to the party-o,
> I don't care if I work or no."

At every accent in the music the picks rose and fell. The captain explained:

"That's the way they work down South. They measure their stroke with the music. You notice their sense of rhythm is flawless."

"Extraordinary! They'll work according to rhythm, eh?"

"They're so musical they can't help it."

"Then maybe we can speed 'em up. See what you think of this idea."

The captain chuckled as the plan was unfolded and the two got into a car and drove away toward regimental headquarters.

Next day the so-called labor troops were delighted to discover a quartet of inky musicians from the regimental band stationed at a bend in their road. The unsuspecting pick and shovel troops welcomed the suggestion of music with wide grins of delight. Their captain made a little speech.

"To lighten the work to-day," he explained, "we are going to have some music. The orchestra comes with the compliments of the colonel."

"Hot dawg!" shouted Amos, "three cheers for de colonel."

They were given with enthusiasm, and the musicians struck up. There was a trombone, a cornet, a bass horn and a snare drum. In obedience to orders they played *On the Mississippi* and they didn't drag it. Picks and shovels rose and fell in harmony with the rapid beat.

Turkey in the Straw and other fast-step favorites followed. In spite of their prejudices against

rapid work, the picks and shovels had to keep time to the music. The captain had been right. They were so full of rhythm they followed it in spite of themselves. When night finally fell, an exhausted battalion sought the chow-line and early bunks.

The orchestra went back to the colonel with a note. It promised to perfect the road system of France if orchestras could be provided for the colored outfits of the A. E. F. But the colonel was fond of his musicians and the indignity was not again visited upon the Third Battalion.

Amos and Willie had a week remaining on their sentence when orders came to move. Believing they had been punished enough, the captain put them on parole. The outfit was shifted to a main road leading to Cologne. They were to clean up in the area surrounding a little town. Ammunition dumps were exploded, wrecked bridges were repaired, streets were cleaned of debris, and so forth.

And Amos went back on K. P.

The Service of Supplies was functioning perfectly now. Food was rolling in plentifully—especially potatoes. The Quartermaster Corps had ordered too heavily and they had to unload somewhere.

This overindulgence of the army was not shared by the French population which was slowly finding its way back into its former homes. Crops had not been planted for years. For many families the food problem was serious. With the pride of a fine race, they kept their troubles to themselves.

One day Amos sat peeling potatoes at the door of the courtyard which housed the kitchen crew. He was in a mellow mood from having consumed an entire quart of lemon extract. A hollow-cheeked Frenchman paused to look longingly at the vegetables which Amos regarded with such aversion.

"Bone swor, Mister Frog," Amos said affably.

"*Bon jour, M'sieu,*" and the man added, "*Vous avez beaucoup pommes de terre.*"

"Come again?" said Amos.

The Frenchman picked up a potato timidly. "*Pomme de terre,*" he explained to Amos.

"Well, I be dawg!" exclaimed Amos. "So dat's what you call dese potatoes, huh? Plumb de tears. Well, Mister Frog, dey done caused me plenty of tears. Dey sho' has. You don't look like you been overeating. How'd you like to have some of dese army plumb de tears?" To be sure he was understood he selected a dozen potatoes and offered them to the Frenchman.

The donation was accepted with tearful gratitude. Amos couldn't understand what the Frenchman said, but he knew from his gestures that he was calling down the blessings of heaven upon his benefactor. The incident gave him a happy thought.

"Dese heah white folks is hungry for vittles," he communed with himself. "We got more potatoes dan we need. Why not give to dem what has not, and let Uncle Sam foot the bill? Cose, the more potatoes I give away, the less I'll have to peel."

Amos knew they would skin him alive if he was caught giving away potatoes that were the property of the United States of America. He saw to it that they didn't catch him. At recognized signals from the philanthropist, residents of the village slipped up and slipped away loaded with fat and nourishing army spuds.

Nor did they want Amos to think them unappreciative. They began to bring him potent stuff in bottles. Cognac, liqueurs, wines. Most of the donations were cognac. The Frenchman knew the American required drink with a wallop. Amos had a secret hiding-place under a loose stone back of the courtyard. As he added to his store one day he noted the fat condition of his cellar, and his soul took comfort for past indignities.

"It's jest like Doremus says," he mused, "dem dat does good, gets done good by."

Americans of all colors and nationalities were coming and going into Germany. These travelers were in the chronic condition of the A. E. F. They were badly in need of drink and they would part with anything they owned to wet down the craving. Seizing upon this situation Amos was soon able to remedy the penniless condition brought on by the stoppage in pay. He inaugurated a blind-tiger business, dispensing a real jolt of cognac for one franc, and other drinks at prices commensurate with their potency.

But not all the thirsty had money. Came one day a frog-eyed American sergeant of Amos' own color. Upon his chest glittered decorations that caught Amos' eye and his fancy. He reached forward and polished the medals with his sleeve.

"Hot dawg, Sarge!" he said admiringly. "Dem medals sho' is outrageous! I would admire to have splendors like dem."

"Pooh!" answered the sergeant, "dem ain't nothing."

The unsuspecting Amos did not know how truly the sergeant spoke. In all the big cities throughout France one could go into souvenir stores and pawn

shops and buy *croix de guerre* or almost any other war decoration. That was how the sergeant had won his glory symbols now glittering on his chest.

"Nothing," repeated Amos. "I'd like to go home wid a lot of dem nothings."

"Well, I ain't interested in any glory badges right now. What I needs is a good long shot of cone-yack."

"You come to the right place, Brother. Dat's what I merchandises."

"But I ain't got no money."

"Den good-by. I'se glad to've met you."

"Boy, I'd give anything for a drink. Anything!"

Amos was about to walk away, but he turned at the last words and focused his eyes on the sergeant's medals. "Well," said he, "maybe we can trade. I sho' crave medals like dem. Dey look noble on my chest when I de-mobilize home. How much cone-yack you take to trade me dem badges?"

After much haggling the coveted medals went to Amos for a full bottle of cognac. And thereafter a new word percolated through the ranks of the armies.

It was to the effect that at a certain small town on the road to Cologne there was a black K. P. with unlimited stores of strong drink and that he had

an itch for medals. You could get anything out of his stock by flashing a war decoration on him.

Came real heroes who, having pockets untenanted by francs, parted with their crosses for Amos' potations. It was even discovered that one could make a better trade by purchasing medals from stores and trading them for the stimulants. The offerings were continuous and heavy but they never satiated Amos' hunger for display.

It was a neat arrangement. In exchange for the potatoes Amos got strong drink. In exchange for the strong drink he got money and medals. Before the game had been going for a month he had accumulated enough capital to make brutal dice raids against the battalion's bank rolls.

And he had corralled an array of war medals which outranked that of General John J. Pershing.

CHAPTER XXXI

Back to Buford

By the spring of 1919 Steve Rhinehart's service with the U. S. A. came to an end with satisfaction on both sides. He was still a second lieutenant, but the army had given him self-control and confidence that is not to be valued in money or preferment. On a certain bright day in May he stood outside the gate of a New York camp with an honorable discharge. A sizable roll nestled in his pocket. It included his savings and dividends from a popular game called poker. He had transportation to East St. Louis, the point of his enlistment.

Rhinehart's mind was made up. Hailing a jitney he rode down-town and made straight for the ticket office of a trunk-line railroad.

"Where to, buddy?" the elderly man behind the brass grill asked.

"Ticket and lower berth to Buford, Tennessee."

Yes. His mind was made up. Whatever happened he had to go back now and straighten out that charge against him. He should have done it

in the first place. And yet he could not say he was sorry for what he had been through. Unless—unless something had happened to Mary Jane. Unless she had married Davis or some other admirer.

A day and night of travel brought Rhinehart to the little wooden station of Buford where he had formerly worked. It was a soft warm May afternoon. You could smell things growing. A music-crazed mocking-bird was singing somewhere.

There were many people he knew at the station. Instead of cold looks and suspicion he encountered nothing but welcome and friendliness. He gave credit for this to the uniform he still wore.

Buford seemed to have stood still since he left. There was Friday Lawson, sleeping on a baggage truck. A little farther down the platform, Town Marshal Tittsworth, the guardian of law and order, was whittling pensively and getting rid of tobacco juice.

Steve walked straight up to him. As the shadow crossed his vision, Marshal Tittsworth looked up. The sight of the newcomer made him jump to his feet and grab his hand with violent cordiality.

"How the hell are you, Steve! I shore am glad to see you back. Reckon you been gunning for Germans from the uniform you're wearing."

Rhinehart was somewhat dazed by this unexpected friendliness.

"I imagined you wanted to see me," he said confusedly.

"Shore I want to see you! Any time. I allus said you was a fine feller. Gonna be with us long?"

"Well, I expected to have to spend considerable time. In the jail, maybe. Aren't you going to arrest me?"

"Aw, go long!"

The town marshal resumed his seat and his whittling. Nothing more could be got out of him.

His first surprise was repeated when Rhinehart walked into the Planters' National Bank. It was the institution he was suspected of robbing and here at least he should encounter something definite. Pausing to knock, he entered the president's office.

Major Crawford Robinson was running over a balance sheet and did not look up for a minute. When he finally raised his head his gray eyebrows contracted and he leaped to his feet so hastily that he overturned his swivel chair. Rhinehart was braced for anything from verbal abuse to a blow on the chin. But the extended hand and the smile were not to be mistaken.

"Steve," cried the banker, "my boy, how are

you? Lord, you look good in that uniform. It answers all the questions we have been asking since you left. And now that you're back, we won't let you get away again."

"But," stammered the dizzy young soldier, "what—how about that—robbery?"

"Oh, that! Forget it."

"But I can't forget it. It's the reason I came back."

"Yes?" the Major winked. "I reckon there was another reason too. The other reason is out at the house now. I'm going to declare a personal holiday for the afternoon and take you home with me. Mary Jane will be right glad to see you. I'll let her tell you all the news. About the robbery and everything else."

The Major's old-fashioned roll-top desk crashed shut. Arm in arm they went outside and got into an automobile. As they drove through a green tunnel of branching elms Rhinehart made one more effort to get information from the man at the wheel.

"By the way," said the Major, ignoring his question, "did you ever think you'd like to get into the banking business? There's money in it, and I reckon I can make an opening for you."

They sped up the long graveled drive to the big

white house without being discovered. In the dim cool hall Major Robinson lifted his voice:

"Mary Jane," he called, "where are you? Come on down. You've got a visitor."

"Who is it, daddy?" the answer descended from an up-stairs bedroom.

"Come on down and see."

A light step sounded above. Steve's heart was pounding in his ears. He thought he had never seen her so beautiful as when she came down the broad padded stairs with one hand on the curving mahogany rail. She was in a filmy white dress, and a shaft of sunlight coming through a stained window made her hair more golden than ever.

On the bottom step she paused uncertainly to study the two in the dim hallway. Then she put one hand to her breast and leaned against the wall to keep from falling.

"Steve!" she said.

The next moment she was laughing and sobbing in his arms.

Major Robinson found matters to occupy him in the library. When the youngsters had regained some semblance of sanity they sought the familiar swing on the wide porch. The fresh perfume of early roses came up to them from the garden. A

bumblebee buzzed and grumbled in the honeysuckle. For a moment the two sat in a haze of happiness too deep for words. Rhinehart was the first to break the spell.

"Come down to earth," he said, "I want to know what this is all about. I was sure I'd be met with about as much cordiality as Jesse James. Instead I'm a returning hero."

"Mine," said Mary Jane proudly.

"But about the robbery. I expected a fight. I'm afraid I'm going to wake up and discover this is all a dream. The Major told me you'd explain everything. Don't keep me waiting any longer."

"No, I won't. It isn't fair."

She got up to return in a moment with two letters. Her face was serious now.

"This one comes first," she directed as she held out a stained sheet that had evidently been torn from a small note-book.

This is what he read:

Nov. 3, 1918

Miss Mary Jane Robinson,
Buford, Tenn. U.S.A.

In accordance with the instructions on the envelope, I am forwarding the inclosed letter. It was found on the body of the writer. He and his de-

tachment were cornered and wiped out. They died fighting to the last, their faces toward the enemy.

Yours very truly,
Robert Shannon,
First Lieut. U.S.A.

Written at Buzancy, France.

Mary Jane held out the other letter. "Now this one," she said.

It was dated November 1, 1918, but had no address. It ran:

Miss Mary Jane Robinson,
Buford, Tenn. U.S.A.
Darling Mary Jane,

To-morrow we start a drive that is expected to break the German line. I'm with the "suicide squad." That is machine-gunners. I have a premonition that I shall not come through alive. In spite of all I can do, this feeling will not be shaken off.

I have no fear of the hereafter, but I can not give up life without at least trying to right a wrong I did an innocent man.

It was I and not Steve Rhinehart who got the ten thousand dollars belonging to the bank. I had lost everything in the cotton market. The threat of ruin and of losing you was more than I could resist. I overheard your father telling Amos and Willie about the money and I followed them. In the lunch wagon I saw Rhinehart's cap. I put the

suspicion on him by leaving the cap in Amos' hand.

I am addressing this letter so it will be sent to you by whomever finds it. My last wish is that you remember me as kindly as you can.

One who loved you,
Ashley Davis.
Captain, U.S.A.

For a long time Rhinehart stood without speaking. There was a brownish stain in one corner of this letter which meant so much to him. At last he took a deep breath and said in a low voice:

"Well, he was a man."

CHAPTER XXXII

Amos Shows His Medals

It did not require much coaxing to get Rhinehart to stay for supper with Mary Jane and her father. Darkness found the young people back in their swing behind the climbing roses. They were talking in low tones when a tall thin figure shuffled around the corner of the house from the kitchen. It was carrying a paper-wrapped bundle.

"It's Camilla," whispered Mary Jane.

The cook stopped some distance off and after coughing discreetly to warn the lovers of her presence, she tittered: "Mister Steve, is dat you?"

"Yes, Camilla. It's I. How are you?"

"I's fine, thank you. You well?"

"Yes, I'm well, thanks. Didn't stop any bullets when I was in France."

"Yassir. I heard 'em say you was back. Uh, Mister Steve——"

"Yes?"

Camilla giggled coyly. "You see anything of my old man over dere? Dat no-'count Amos?"

"I sure did see him. We had an awful battle. Got captured and had to fight our way out of the German lines. He probably saved my life."

"Sho' 'nuff, now! Dat boy's been writing me some awful strong tales. Says he dictates 'em to Willie. Dey told 'bout how he was fighting and killing Germans. I reckon he must have slewn more'n a thousand. I thought he was jes' lying to me. But if you say you foughten wid him, I guess maybe he was telling de truth."

Steve squeezed the small hand he held in the darkness. "Camilla!" he said, "wives should always believe what their husbands tell 'em."

"Yes, Mister Steve, but you got no idea what lies dat Amos used to tell. And cose I thought he was jes' keeping it up in France."

"Probably everything in the letters was true."

Camilla was moving off in the darkness. "Listen to dat now!" she muttered to herself. "I never would have thought he had it in him."

As she shuffled down the drive toward the gate she revised the reception she had been planning for her returning mate.

Amos and Willie were due home in ten days, and Camilla appointed herself a committee of one to see that there were fitting ceremonies.

No. 8 was on time. The returning warriors recognized the familiar scenes as they drew near the town. They were munching bananas from a sack and eagerly pointing out landmarks to each other.

"There's old man Waterfield," Amos indicated a figure on the road that paralleled the track, "riding that old white mare of his'n."

"And there's de old tile factory."

"We're getting close."

Ahead the engine gave a warning screech.

"Old hog-head whistling for the crossing. Better begin surrounding your equipment."

They got ready to lug off their bags. Willie looked at his friend and shook his head doubtfully. He was eying an array of decorations on Amos' bosom. The display had made the other passengers on the Jim Crow car pop-eyed since they boarded the train at Cairo.

Amos' wide chest was covered—was shingled—with medals of all descriptions. There were French, British, American—and even an Iron Cross of Germany. If decorations meant anything here was the bravest soldier that ever went to war.

"Boy," said Willie doubtfully, "you know you ain't got no right to wear all them medals."

"Dey're mine, ain't they?"

"Yeah, dey're yours all right."

"Well, if dey're mine I got a right to wear 'em. And furthermore,"—he waved a large and threatening black fist under the broad nostrils of his companion,—"furthermore, when we get off dis train I ain't gonna have no talk out of you concerning dem medals. One bad crack and I'll make you wish you was back fighting a German Army. Compree?"

"All right, all right!" Willie gave in hastily. "I was just warning you, dass all. If you can get away with it, I'm for you."

Brake-shoes screeched, the train stopped with a jerk. Framed through the window they saw the grimy and grateful façade of the Catfish Castle. But there were no darkies lounging about in front. Another funny thing was that a blare of sudden music came to them through the door. Outside a brass band was running *The Star Spangled Banner* ragged.

"Must be some big bug getting off," Amos observed as they walked slowly down the aisle lugging their kits.

When the Two Black Crows appeared in the door, a great shout went up. The band played louder than ever.

"Dere dey is!" some one shouted.

"Hot dawg! Gaze on dem medals."

"Hello, Amos. You fighting son-of-a-gun."

"How'd you leave General Pershing?"

"Boy, we 'spected you to bring back de Kaiser."

Amos and Willie fell into the arms of the cheering crowd. They were completely bewildered, but they realized at last that the demonstration was for them. All Henpeck was there and it was the Henpeck Jazz Orchestra making the noise. On the skirts of the dark gathering, grinning white folks waved and yelled.

Camilla had done her work well. When you are married to a hero you must act accordingly. As a welcome to her returning husband she had prepared this triumph. Naturally she put herself in the front of the reception committee. And out of deference to her husband's preference she handed him a wriggling creature before she saluted him herself. The wriggling creature turned out to be Amos' dog—Bingo. He had a red ribbon about his neck. He was so glad to see his long-lost master that he tried his best to shake his tail off.

That demonstration over, Camilla advanced in a queenly manner as befitted the wife of the great man. Remembering the bitter past, Amos drew fearfully back.

"I ain't gonna hit you," she hissed.

"Oh," said Amos. And he allowed her to plant a chaste kiss on his cheek.

Not to be outdone, he returned the caress. In a voice that reached all ears he cried, "Camilla, my beauteous bein' what thou art!"

They fell in and marched in state toward Henpeck. Amos' chest with its medals headed the column. Beside him walked Camilla and Willie. Bingo scampered in and out among their legs, hoping to attract attention. The band came next. And behind, in noisy admiration, trailed the colored citizens, large and small.

Arrived at the hero's home, a few of the élite were invited to stay for supper. This included members of the band, who took the victuals as their pay.

Camilla, with all her faults, was a cook. Her feast for Amos marked the highest point ever reached by the culinary art in Henpeck. There was fried chicken with gravy on the side, chitterlings and head cheese, hominy, corn bread and biscuits, sweet potatoes floating in sugared juice, new peas young and tender, cocoanut and chocolate cake, coffee, steaming hot and strong enough to speak for itself.

After the last cleaned plate had been pushed aside, the doors were thrown open. Those who didn't get in on the banquet were now allowed to enter, and smoke or dip. Pipes filled the air with a pungent comfort. The snuff bottle circulated from lip to lip.

"Now, Amos," said Camilla smiling coyly, "you must tell us something of your adventures in de war. How you killed all dem Germans."

"Ho," said Amos, waving his cigar, " 'twasn't nothing. Nothing a-tall!"

The company would not be dismissed thus by the shrinking hero. They shouted:

"Come on, Amos, tell us 'bout it."

"You must have rambled some to get dem crosses and things."

"Read your medals, Amos. Tell us how you got 'em."

Amos rose to his feet and smiled upon his admirers. "Well, if I got to," he said, "I guess I might as well start." He picked up a *croix de guerre* and let it drop back against the khaki.

"Dat'n," he said, "was given to me by the King of France. It was for wrecking a regiment of Germans with my bare knuckles. He said he never knew anything like the feat I performed. This heah

round one come to me from the Prince Regal of Senegal. It was for taking a battery of artillery and slaughtering boo-coo men wid a butcher knife. And dis heah star come fum General Pershing. When he give it to me he said, 'Amos, you is the best soldier I got and I ain't lying.' "

He paused to see how it was going. It was going great. Their mouths had sagged open and their eyes hung out so far you could have knocked them off with a stick. They were too fascinated even to speak. Amos drew a long luxurious breath.

"This gold cross yere," he indicated another symbol of valor, "was for hardly nothing a-tall. I crawled over into a German trench at night, massacreed de garrison and brought back seven wounded Americans to de hospital."

There was an interruption and the narrator turned. Standing in the door was a dark man in uniform. He had pop-eyes and the three stripes of the sergeant on his coat sleeve. The newcomer was looking sternly over the company, when Camilla caught sight of him and went hastily to make him welcome.

"Oh, Amos," she twittered, "heah's a little surprise I got for you. It's my old friend Sergeant Henry Skip. He stopped off here on his way to

El Paso. I knowed you two heroes would like to meet together."

Amos didn't answer. He had a sinking feeling in his stomach. It arose from a conviction that he had seen this man somewhere before. Camilla introduced them.

"Amos, dis heah's Sergeant Skip; Sergeant, dat's my husband, Amos."

The sergeant was studying Amos and his array of decorations.

"I've met your husband before," he said in a tone that Amos hated. He reached forward strong dark hands and began plucking medals from the chest of the unprotesting Amos.

"Henry Skip," indignantly exclaimed the astounded Camilla, "do you mean to tell me dis Tennessee Owl here didn't win all dem medals, by his valor in de war?"

"Why, Camilla, my beauteous being what thou art," said Skip with an air of arrogant scorn, "dat boy spent most of his time in de mess house peeling potatoes."

Amos' jet-black complexion suddenly seemed to change, if possible, to an agitated red, as Camilla, with pop eyes glaring through his body, reached for the broom.

"Amos Crow! What you got to say for yourself?" she demanded.

Amos meekly replied, "Mama, bring on de potatoes—and tell Willie I'll be seeing him."

FINIS